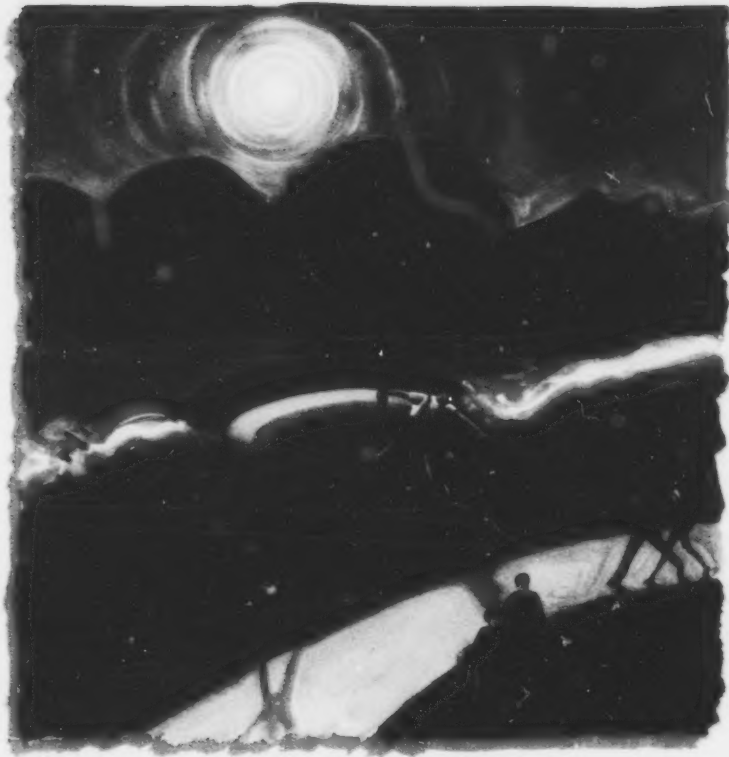




***Making
Changes***

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A
PLACE
TO
START

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A Summary

**Community Panel
Family and Children's Services
Legislation Review
in British Columbia
October 1992**

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data
Community Panel, Family and Children's Services
Legislation Review in British Columbia.
Making changes, a place to start, a summary

ISBN 0 - 7718 - 9298 - 5

1. Children - Legal status, laws, etc. - British
Columbia. 2. Child welfare - British Columbia. I. Title.

KEB418 . 5 . C55C65 1992 344 . 711'0327 C92- 092390 - 9
KF3735 . C65 1992

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A Place to Start

In November 1991, the Honourable Joan Smallwood, Minister of Social Services, appointed the Community Panel to review child protection legislation in British Columbia. The Minister asked us to travel throughout the province to hear a broad range of opinions about child welfare, and to make recommendations for change.

The Minister asked the Community Panel to prepare a public report by October 1992 that would provide the framework for new child protection legislation in British Columbia.

Throughout our travels around the province, we were pleased with the high level of interest, the creative thinking and the seemingly inexhaustible store of ideas presented.

While some told us that they believed that our current child welfare laws and structures worked well, or at best required only modest improvements, most described the need for major change.

Families told us of being frightened and threatened by a child welfare structure they thought should have provided help and support. Families also told us that all too often problems had to reach crisis proportions before help could be obtained.

Young people said the experience of being moved from home into government care was "like going from the frying pan into the fire."

Ministry staff, service providers and caregivers described to us the feelings of frustration and isolation. They said the "system" is focused on symptoms, not on the underlying causes of the problems facing families and children.

Community representatives, especially those from ethno-cultural groups, described current child protection structures and practices as being out of touch with their needs and often discriminatory.

In writing this report we have tried to be conscious of the cultural and racial diversity of the people who make up our province. We see the need to preserve and enhance our pluralistic heritage and to work for equality.

All of us belong to a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual and multireligious province where no one group should be more privileged than any other. We have attempted to reflect this theme throughout this report. The individual and collective rights and obligations of all of us can be realized only when there is equality and justice for all. Racism, sexism and classism continue to create barriers that prevent equal access to programs and services. We must become inclusive of all people by adopting cross-cultural, non-racist and non-discriminatory policies and practices.

We don't claim that this report will provide all the answers to some very large and complicated problems. We do feel, however, that this report can serve as a starting point for the development of stronger and healthier communities for families, children, youth — for all of us.

We have made three types of recommendations:

- in some areas we have identified a specific problem, and are recommending a specific solution;
- in other areas we have identified a problem and have recommended a range of options, or a process for further consideration; and
- in a small number of areas we have identified a subject where we only have questions without framing either specific problems or solutions. These are areas where we recommend further study.

There are many things this report is not. It is not a research paper, though we did commission research on specific topics. It makes no claim to providing the recipe for fixing all that ails our child welfare system. It does not respond to each and every problem, comment or suggestion we heard.

The members of the Community Panel have been united by one common theme and one common goal — to listen to the people and communities of this province and to provide a voice for people and communities to speak to government. The road for us has not always been easy — the issues under consideration strike at the very heart of the relationships among families, children and their governments.

This report is about our attempt to capture the significant threads and common issues that communities told us needed immediate and long-term change.

We hope that we have done justice to what we have heard.

Guiding Principles

The following principles have guided our work and must form the basis for change:

Dignity and Respect:

All people are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.

Inclusiveness:

We are a pluralist society and there must be equality for all people. Equality can only be achieved by the removal of historic barriers within the system.

Freedom from Abuse:

All people have a right to live free from abuse. Government has a special obligation to protect vulnerable members of society, especially children.

Involvement:

Individuals must be involved in all decisions that affect their lives.

Communities must be allowed and assisted to play their vital and supportive role in the lives of families and children.

Continuity and Stability:

The bond between birth families and their children is never extinguished.

Each individual has a right to continuity of relationships, and to their religious and cultural heritage.

Equity:

The goal of government programs must be to ensure equity for individuals, families and communities.

Close to Home:

Services must be community-based, coordinated and integrated.

Poverty

"There are more lost years from poverty in Canada than from cancer. We don't know how to end cancer yet, but poverty can be ended."

Community activist

The greatest single issue in child welfare is poverty. In all parts of this wealthy province, we met with young people who told us they were hungry and needed housing. Looking back on their childhood, they said they were forced to grow up too fast. While other children slept soundly in secure family homes, they lay awake worrying about eviction notices, empty food cupboards and parents worn down by the stress of survival. They grew up angry, blaming their parents for not providing for them. Going to school without proper clothing or school supplies, they were targets of bigotry and discrimination that increased with every year of their young lives. And worst of all, they say worse than the deprivation and discrimination and the thousand and one other injuries and insults that go with being poor - poverty left them with unshakeable feelings of being neglected, unloved and worthless.

Parents told us that poverty means never having quite enough of anything and always being afraid that because of it, they'll lose their health, their home, or, worst of all, their children. They spoke of their anguish when their children go into care, and of a different anguish when the children return to find nothing has changed at home. Parents stressed over and over again that they do not choose to live in poverty but that with high unemployment, low income assistance and a seemingly endless number of administrative barriers in their way, they could not escape.

We have heard the current welfare system in Canada described as "business-oriented" welfare. According to this analysis, income assistance programs serve to reduce poor people's bargaining power with employers and government, and force them into low-paying jobs.

There are many income assistance programs and sub-programs within the welfare system. None of them, individually or collectively, provides enough money for most families to raise their children to a standard that the same system judges to be adequate. Income assistance must be increased to levels that guarantee that families can meet their basic needs and live in health and dignity.

Governments and a substantial segment of the public continue to believe that charity is an adequate substitute for social programs. It is definitely not a substitute; rather, it reinforces the policies and programs that keep thousands of families and children in poverty.

Discrimination has direct and concrete effects on poor people's lives. Banks refuse them bank accounts; landlords refuse to rent to them; teachers make self-fulfilling assumptions about the lack of potential in students from low-income families. We also heard that many government staff frequently accept these stereotypes, and act accordingly in decisions regarding child welfare. This discrimination is even more damaging when it applies to visible and linguistic minorities.

We believe that discrimination against poor people must be addressed both in attitudes and in the language and practices of government programs.

One in five children in British Columbia lives in poverty. This statistic translates into tens of thousands of children who have not enough food, or the right food to keep them healthy. We believe that the government must ensure that all children in British Columbia receive the food they need to grow up in good health.

Many landlords and building managers simply won't rent to single mothers, young people, families on income assistance or visible minorities. Though provincial legislation clearly states that landlords must not discriminate, this has only served in some cases to push the discrimination underground. Advocacy on behalf of tenants is required. This function was fulfilled by the Office of the Rentalsman prior to 1984. Since then, no office has filled this role.

The deeper reasons for these problems are again tied to public policy and programs. Cuts in federal funding for co-op and subsidized housing have resulted in fewer available units. In some communities, there is no subsidized housing at all. More low-cost housing is necessary across the province.

Poverty affects people with disabilities in a disproportionate way. On one hand, they generally have higher transportation, housing and medical costs than able-bodied people. On the other, they have fewer opportunities to meet those costs.

Families with a disabled parent or child face extra emotional and financial pressures. In many cases, they need long-term, flexible support services to help them cope. These services are not widely available, and when services are in place, some disabled people have trouble accessing them.

Unemployment and a lack of social and income support programs make it almost impossible for refugee families to escape the poverty trap. Many live in unsafe surroundings and work at illegal or extremely low-paying jobs. Socially, they are often isolated and the target of discrimination. To compound these problems, jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments complicate an already frustrating situation. The result is that Ministry of Social Services staff have few alternatives for meeting the needs of refugees.

We believe that all programs and supports available to citizens and landed immigrants should be made available to refugees.

The working poor are those who work for a living but still cannot meet their basic needs. This includes people who work for minimum wage, below minimum wage or at a wage inadequate to support their families. Farm labourers and domestics are not covered by minimum wage laws, a situation that has a special impact on refugees and visible minorities.

We believe that minimum wage must be raised substantially in order to bring the working poor out of poverty. Because many parts of the province have high unemployment, regional economic development must be a high priority for the government.

Poverty - Recommendations

1. Eradicating poverty in all its forms must be the main focus of a new government policy so that parents or primary caregivers may meet the basic needs of their children.
2. All income support programs must be raised to levels that allow families to provide for their basic needs.
3. The Ministry of Social Services must establish a staff education program regarding the realities of living in poverty.
4. The government must mount public education programs to dispel the myths surrounding people living in poverty.
5. Government must maintain and expand school meal programs throughout the province.
6. The number of social housing units must be increased to provide more accommodation for low-income families.
7. Federal funding for co-op housing must be reinstated.
8. The government must bring back the position of Rentalsman in order to ensure fairness in the rental housing market.
9. Income assistance levels for persons with disabilities must reflect their special needs.
10. Increased income assistance must not affect the eligibility of persons with disabilities for other services and programs.
11. All programs and supports available to citizens and landed immigrants must be made available to refugee families.
12. The minimum wage must be tied to a fixed percentage of the average weekly wage, as calculated by Statistics Canada.
13. Minimum wage law must be applied to all workers in British Columbia.

Community Development

"We need to live in a place where we can depend on our neighbours and have our neighbours depend on us."

Community member

In our consultations around the province, we often heard comments like "Victoria is a long way away from us." For many communities, family and child services do not seem relevant to their needs; they feel their opinions are ignored, that they have no alternatives offered them, and that natural community leadership is not respected or consulted.

Community development involves people coming together in the places where they feel they belong, deciding what their common needs are, and organizing to meet those needs. It is an ongoing process that shifts decision making power closer to the people.

People can and do belong to a number of communities at once. These may include neighbourhoods, professional, religious, social or cultural communities, or communities created by common need. For example, the families of children with disabilities are a community who have found a strong voice for themselves.

The panel stresses that financial and other resources are necessary to support such efforts, particularly those organized by disadvantaged communities in our society. There must be an established core of services from which no community can opt out.

Creating a community focus in family support and child protection will not be accomplished by simply creating a number of positions called "community development workers." While there may be new positions necessary, we believe that major changes can be made with existing staff and resources.

The Ministry of Social Services must adopt a new orientation. Staff must have the opportunity to analyze problems from a community perspective and seek community solutions. Except in cases where there is clear conflict of interest, staff should be permitted to become involved in their communities and should be respected for such involvement.

The process of community development allows for each community to plan for its own needs. Communities need ways to do this planning and formal mechanisms to put these plans forward to government so that they may access resources.

We do not believe that community development or the mechanisms used to develop a community plan come in any single form; rather, they are as unique as the communities they represent. The only common feature is that at the end of the process, a plan or needs assessment is produced that features the support services needed by that community for its families and children.

Government has traditionally been wary of supporting groups doing community development on the grounds that they are "political", the results of their work are not easily measured, and given the chance, they will make excessive demands on the public purse.

We believe that a new orientation must include these community groups. This would recognize their value as sources of information about community needs and expressions of local preferences.

We believe that ministries with responsibilities to provide services to families and children should adopt a community development orientation. Some new cross-ministry body, such as a commission, attended by government but with a majority representation by community groups, would open the way to change at the ministry level.

Community Development - Recommendations

1. Communities must be assisted in developing community plans or needs assessments that represent their unique needs for family support services.
2. The provincial government must provide clear mechanisms for communities to present their community needs assessment for funding consideration.
3. Government staff must be trained and encouraged to take a community approach to their child protection and family support work.
4. Resources must be allocated to groups that conduct community development work.
5. An inter-ministerial commission must be struck to create a work plan leading to a new community development focus within government. It should include government and staff and have majority representation by community groups.

Access to Information

"Imagine someone having a secret file on you."

Youth in care

One of the features of modern government is its expanding ability to collect information on its citizens. The panel heard many concerns about what personal information the government collects, what it does with that information, and what it should be allowed to do with it. Many of these concerns have been addressed by the new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, which comes into effect in 1993. However, child protection and family support issues require special attention.

A clear distinction must be made between two types of information: public and personal. Personal information is about individuals and should remain private, subject to a limited number of strictly applied exceptions. Public information can include everything from ministry annual reports to detailed program descriptions and should be widely available. It should also be in plain language, translated into languages where there is significant need, culturally appropriate, and in formats for people with disabilities.

Adults and children alike expressed the fear that gossip might find its way into their files, surfacing one day to be used against them.

Guidelines are necessary to control what information is collected and what is retained. People must be able to challenge incorrect information, and correct or complete it as necessary. They must also be able to have inaccurate or irrelevant information held by the government destroyed.

People must be told when a file or other record about them or about people for whom they are responsible has been opened. If people don't know that information is being collected, they are unable to correct or challenge incorrect or irrelevant information.

We believe that the word "confidentiality" should be replaced by "privacy" whenever government is dealing with personal information. This would root the protection of personal information in a widely understood human right instead of a murkier administrative concept ("this information is private - it belongs to someone"). Doing so would make it harder for confidentiality to be invoked as an excuse for non-disclosure of information. When information is requested, the government agency shall be required to justify any withholding of information.

Protecting the vulnerable members of our society justifies some exceptions to the right of personal privacy. These exceptions must be limited in number and clearly stated in law. Law enforcement, protection of informants' anonymity, and public safety are among the areas in which exceptions are justified. The new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* addresses this issue in many of its provisions, however, the following issues are particularly relevant to family support and child protection services.

There is concern that control of communicable diseases be included in the exceptions to privacy allowed under the public interest override. The devastating consequences of improper release of this information make it necessary that this exception be governed by strict guidelines, which are currently lacking.

Sharing personal information by government agencies is necessary, and of great benefit, in child protection work. There was also agreement that such sharing has a great potential for improper use.

Standardized guidelines should specify that:

- the individual to whom the information applies, or their custodian, has given consent;
- the information is clearly relevant to the case at hand; and
- it is clearly for the benefit of the individual involved, and/or for the safety of service providers and/or caregivers.

To protect children and other vulnerable people, employment screening should be introduced on a universal basis. This must include the notification and consent of the prospective employee to such checks, and contain the right of appeal. Information divulged in checks must be relevant to the position under consideration.

Many presenters called for public registries containing information about child abusers, particularly sex offenders. We believe registries will not prevent child abuse, and reject any plans to establish one in British Columbia. The briefings we received about several existing or proposed systems leave us at best unconvinced and at worst profoundly disturbed about their potential for misuse.

In our chapter *Guardianship*, we have proposed a redefinition of adoption based on the principle that the bond between children and their families cannot be extinguished. This redefinition would provide open access to adoption records in the future and will require a transition phase to deal with information and privacy issues arising from previous adoptions.

Access to Information - Recommendations

1. Government must make the strongest possible efforts to ensure that public information on family support and child protection is easily accessible and widely available.
2. Guidelines must be written to ensure that information held by government is relevant, accurate, complete and open to review by the individual to whom it pertains or who is responsible for the person to whom it pertains.
3. People must have the right to correct, complete, challenge or remove information held by government.

4. Information used for making decisions about families and children must be properly recorded.
5. Individuals must be notified that a record about them or about people for whom they are responsible has been created.
6. "Confidentiality" should be replaced by the word "privacy" in policies and procedures regarding family support and child protection, and in general usage by government staff working in these fields.
7. Standardized guidelines must be created for the sharing of personal information among ministries and agencies.
8. Information sharing must be done only with the consent of the individual to whom the information pertains or the person responsible for that individual.
9. Legislation must be enacted to provide for a single, standard process for employment screening, applicable to all government funded or regulated agencies dealing with vulnerable people. The employment screening process must:
 - comply with the principles of administrative fairness, including right of appeal and relevance of information;
 - be administered through a central agency, such as the Freedom of Information Privacy Commissioner; and
 - address ongoing employment (where it is up to the employee to disclose charges or convictions of abuse and where failure to do so may be grounds for discipline).
10. Government must adapt its information practices regarding adoptions to the principles on access to information contained in this report.

Advocacy

"Doing advocacy work on a case-by-case basis, without also trying to correct problems in the system, is like trying to dig a hole in the water."

Community activist

Advocacy is the act of speaking in support of human concerns or needs. Where people have their own voice, advocacy means making sure they are heard; where they have difficulty in speaking, it means providing help; where they have no voice, it means speaking for them.

There should be a range of advocacy services available. Since the parent is the child's natural advocate, parents should be supported in this role wherever possible. However, another family member may fulfill this role, including a member of the extended family. Children sometimes need an advocate who is not a relative. In some cases the advocate can be a respected community member or someone with formal expertise in child protection and advocacy.

An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic (universal, system-wide) family and child issues. The purpose of the Advocacy Office would be to monitor and audit family and child services provided by provincial ministries. It would also undertake individual advocacy on a regional basis for families and children receiving government services. The Advocacy Office would absorb family and child functions currently provided by the Office of the Ombudsman.

In addition to assistance from the Family and Child Advocacy Office, families and children may find advocates in their extended families and communities. Government should recognize and encourage the use of these natural advocates.

Young people's wishes must always be listened to with respect by those acting on their behalf, and given weight when decisions are made. This does not ignore the fact that professional judgement is often required to determine the best interests of the younger or more vulnerable members of our society. It does however mean that the individual's preference must not be ignored. In some cases, the presence of an independent advocate may be necessary to see that this is done.

The worker, who is the system's representative, should also advocate within "the system" for families and children. Advocacy must be part of the job, not an add-on to be done if time permits. It must be possible to review decisions. Management within the various social services must accept and value the staff member who takes up a person's case. There should be no fear of retribution if a staff member makes an appeal on behalf of a client.

Non-governmental advocacy organizations have a role in family and child advocacy. The panel urges that funding be made available by the provincial government to support external advocacy groups without compromising their independence.

It will be necessary to change attitudes regarding people's right to advocacy. Within the government, resources will be necessary for training and workshops aimed

at all levels of government. External advocacy groups should be consulted in the design of this training, and should deliver some of it. In addition, public education is required to help people of all ages understand that it is their right to be heard if they have a complaint or concern.

Advocacy — Recommendations

1. An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office, responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature, should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases through a network of regional offices.
2. The government must respect the wishes of young people and act on those wishes when they are not in clear conflict with their best interests.
3. All young people who enter alternative care or receive government services have a right to an independent advocate if they wish, and must be provided with that advocate's name and the means to contact that advocate.
4. Legislation must specify that before any decision is made regarding child protection and family support, families must be consulted as to their wishes. Families must have access to advocacy services during this process of consultation.
5. Government must have the flexibility to accommodate the distinct advocacy needs or practices of specific communities.
6. Government must recognize the advocacy role of staff and caregivers, and develop a working environment in which they can act in the best interests of their clients.
7. The Ministry of Social Services must develop appeal processes that allow staff and caregivers to take on an advocacy role without fear of retribution from their superiors.
8. The Ministry of Social Services should establish a task force to formulate appeal and review processes for staff and caregivers.
9. All ministries with responsibilities for families and children must accept the legitimacy of external advocacy.
10. Funding must be available to support independent advocacy groups without compromising their independence.
11. Resources must be invested in order to change government attitudes towards internal and external advocacy.
12. Public education programs must be undertaken to make people more aware of their right to be heard and to be provided with advocacy services.

Support Services

"It is time to write legislation which will truly protect our children by giving them the skills and supports necessary to live healthy lives."

Community organization

Families, children, youth and staff wanted more support services. Many families are afraid to contact the Ministry because they fear that they may be subjected to a child protection investigation and that the child may be removed from their custody. This lack of access to support services forced many families into crisis. Families require support services because of the many stresses that they face in our society, including poverty, housing and transportation costs, difficulty finding childcare, single parenthood, and other shifts in family structure.

Support services include natural supports, such as friends and relatives who can offer assistance and advice; community supports that enhance the quality of life, such as parks programs, youth clubs and recreation programs; general community and government support programs, such as prenatal classes or family counselling; and issue-specific services, such as sexual assault counselling. Support services may be offered in communities, by individuals, volunteer organizations, various levels of government or funded agencies.

Effective family support services must enhance the strengths of families and recognize their capacity to change and learn. The entire family and child services system must be redirected towards providing support services and away from intervention programs.

The current family and child services system places priority on the needs of children. Rather than just centring services on the child, we believe that entire families require support and services.

Families should have direct and voluntary access to services without becoming part of a social worker's caseload. The method a family uses to gain access to a service must have no bearing whatsoever on the quality and timing of service delivery. Priority of service must be based upon needs.

Government should provide more funding to community-based support services rather than to highly interventionist, statutory programs. Government must recognize that many communities are not provided with their fair share of support services and must make efforts to equalize the delivery of services between communities. The interdependence between families and their communities makes it appropriate for communities to play a vital role in identifying, planning and ranking the services that will enhance and develop family strengths.

Support Services - Recommendations

1. The provincial government must provide the funding and personnel to develop a continuum of support services in communities according to community-identified plans.
2. Communities must recognize their obligation to develop community plans concerning family and child support services that represent the unique needs of the community. These plans will allow communities to review, monitor, evaluate, rank and recommend support services and to conduct an ongoing evaluation of services.
3. A mechanism must be established to allow communities to fulfill their obligation to develop family and child support service plans.
4. The provincial government must provide clear mechanisms for communities to present their community needs assessment for funding consideration.
5. The provincial government must accept financial responsibility for providing comprehensive community information concerning family and child support services.
6. All communities must develop plans to ensure that the public has ways of getting information on family and child support services.
7. Provincial government funding must focus on family and child support services.
8. Mechanisms must be established to ensure service equity between communities.

Youth Services

"The current system focuses on youth as the problem rather than the problems at work in families and even the whole community. We need a focus on families as well as youth."

Youth in care

Youth is a time of rapid change in between childhood and adulthood when young people are coming to terms with their own identity. The relationships youth have with their families are changing and, as a result, many youth are in conflict with their families. Both youth and their parents are angry with the "system" that underestimates the real needs of families and children and creates a dangerous tendency to assess their needs superficially. Conflict between parents and young people are often made more intense by a lack of opportunities and by discrimination from the community.

All youth have a right to have their basic needs met in an environment that is safe, healthy and nurturing. They have the right to continuity and stability in their relationships. Young people need money, housing, education alternatives, counselling and adults who are respectful and caring in their lives.

Currently, when young people leave home, they generally do not qualify for income support programs available under the *GAIN Act* (Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act). The *GAIN Act* must be revised to be more flexible so that youth living apart from their families can meet their basic needs.

Young parents are particularly vulnerable because they are still children in the eyes of the law and the community, yet they have all the adult responsibilities of raising a child. Youth who are parents need enough money, housing, education, day care and support programs. These were their primary concerns. There is a notable lack of services for young parents, particularly young fathers. It is critical that the ministries responsible for providing services to children recognize and provide for the significant needs of young parents.

Youth in correctional institutions have special needs. Within these institutions, they are isolated from their families and friends. They want access to anger management programs, alcohol and drug counselling, more time outdoors, more privacy and flexible education options. They need an advocate within the system.

All youth corrections programs are delivered through the Ministry of Attorney General, which is also responsible for a much larger adult corrections system. Young people are not served best in a system where the adult corrections model is the focus.

Street youth have many needs. Some have run from difficult and often abusive family situations or government care. This problem is spreading to communities throughout the province. Programs for street youth are often planned in isolation, uncoordinated and unreliably funded. In many parts of the province, only very limited service is available to street youth.

There is an inconsistency in the age of majority in British Columbia and across Canada. The age of majority should be set at 18. Age should not be a barrier to services. A lower age of majority does not mean the government may end services at 18 or 19.

Youth Services - Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Social Services must commit sufficient resources to respond to and assess the needs of young people and their families.
2. The Ministry of Social Services must expand and enhance the range of services available to all youth and their families, regardless of whether the youth are in care. These services range from family counselling and mediation services, to safe houses and crisis services for youth.
3. While paying special attention to specific communities, such as isolated and/or ethno-cultural communities, services for youth and their families must be provided consistently throughout the province according to need.
4. Amendments must be made to the *GAIN Act* to allow youth between age 16 and the age of majority to be eligible for income assistance. Emergency assistance must be available to these youth without conditions. Ongoing assistance must be available and be based on a thorough assessment of the needs of the youth in the context of their families and communities. Eligibility for ongoing financial support must not be tied to the youth's acceptance of services.
5. The ministries of Health, Social Services, and Education must jointly fund community-based youth health clinics throughout British Columbia.
6. The Ministry of Education must maintain sex education programs as part of the school curriculum, and these programs must be made available to children in younger grades.
7. Services must be available to all youth, regardless of sexual orientation.
8. Needle exchange programs must be maintained and expanded throughout the province.
9. The ministries of Health, Education and Social Services must provide funding and integrated planning for programs to meet the needs of young parents. Communities must be involved in the planning process.
10. Programs targeted specifically for young fathers must be developed.

11. Responsibility for all programs and institutions administered under the *Young Offenders Act* must be transferred from the Ministry of Attorney General to the Ministry of Social Services.
12. All other related ministries must share responsibility for these youth in the community before and after release.
13. The focus of corrections programs for youth must be shifted from the institutions to more community-based programming.
14. An advocacy service must be available within institutions.
15. Services for street youth must be street-based, highly visible, available day and night, and be staffed with well-trained and receptive workers.
16. Methods must be established to ensure that street youth have a range of medical services available to them.
17. The Attorney General must enforce all laws that deal with the exploitation of youth.
18. All levels of government and community organizations must plan, coordinate and deliver necessary services to street youth.
19. The legal age of majority must be reduced to 18 years.

Service Delivery Structure

"Children and families do not come with compartmentalized needs and problems, and the response system must not respond in compartmentalized ways."

Advocacy organization

The way government services are organized is confusing to everyone. Families and children find it difficult to access services, and are tired of being shuffled from one government ministry to the next. Staff are frustrated by the lack of cooperation and communication between ministries. Caregivers say the inconsistencies between ministries are detrimental to the service they deliver.

Every study conducted in British Columbia to determine the needs of families and children has drawn the same conclusion: services must be integrated, locally based, and designed solely for the purpose of meeting the needs of families and children.

Although efforts have been made in the past to integrate and control services, none have achieved the desired impact. Further, creating one single ministry to be responsible for services for families and children will not alleviate the current problems. Rather, radical changes are needed at both a local level and within the administrative structures of the individual ministries that provide services to families and children.

These changes will lead to the establishment of neighbourhood-based, integrated offices that include staff from the ministries providing services to families and children. Communities will play a significant role in this integrated system with each office responding to the specific needs of its host community. The nature of the changes we propose, and the characteristics of each centre, are described in our recommendations.

Services delivered directly by government represent only a portion of the service delivery picture. Over the last ten years, there has been a significant increase in the services being delivered by funded agencies. We understand that the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and the Public Sector will include a major review of government contracting in the social services.

Service Delivery Structure - Recommendations

1. The ministries of Health, Social Services, Attorney General and Education must adopt a common philosophy and common values, develop a common service language and a compatible financial system and policies, adopt a common set of geographic boundaries, consistent privacy rules and information-sharing practices, and develop compatible management and administrative structures to support the delivery of services from local, integrated centres.
2. Ministries must work together when planning, developing and expanding services for families and children.
3. Direct services to families and children provided by the Ministry of Health (public health, child and youth mental health, alcohol and drug programs), Ministry of Social Services (family and child services, services for the developmentally disabled), and the Ministry of Attorney General (youth probation officers) must be delivered out of neighbourhood-based, integrated centres.
4. Staff from the Ministry of Education and other ministries that provide direct and related services to families and children must be included in these centres (see recommendation No. 3) where appropriate.
5. Each service centre must have the following characteristics: hours of operation that respond to the needs of families and children; accessibility for the disabled; respect for and responsiveness to the specific ethnic communities involved; and a welcoming environment.
6. Community-based mechanisms must be established to ensure that each centre is responding to the needs of the host community.
7. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy must mandate and direct the development and implementation of this integrated system.
8. Government must appoint a Select Committee of the Legislature on Families and Children. One of its functions will be to monitor and evaluate this integrated system.
9. Implementation of the integrated system must be completed in three years.
10. The Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and the Public Sector must address the issues cited in this report in its review of government contracting policies and procedures.

Guardianship

"To me good child welfare has to be built on the notion that you are the parent forever and ever. Nobody or the law can remove that right from you. The legislation is wrong if it tries to overlook that reality."

Community member

Under the current legislation, children who become permanent wards of the government or who are adopted, legally lose all bonds with their family and heritage and are denied a relationship with their birth family. We believe that children's connections with their family of origin, history and heritage are of vital importance.

The bond between children and their birth families can never be broken. This fundamental belief leads us to reject the current understanding of "guardianship" used in much family legislation. Generally, "guardianship" is a catch-all term that implies legal ownership and permits the extinguishment of birth families' rights, responsibilities and obligations. For this reason, we propose to abolish the term in future legislation and to replace it with the concepts of "kinship", "custody" and "care", which are defined in our recommendations. This is not just a word game; we are proposing a radical shift in understanding that has significant implications for all families. Children will never again be legally cut off from their roots. Birth families and their children will be able to maintain a relationship, consistent with their child's welfare, and the life-long connection between birth families and their children will never be terminated.

Consistent with our abolition of guardianship, "adoption" must also be redefined. Under current legislation, adopted children are considered to be "as if born to" the adoptive family, extinguishing the relationship between the child and the birth family. We have concluded the "as if born to" clause is not realistic in these times. Because the connection between birth families and their children is life-long and cannot be extinguished, all parties in an adoption have a right to receive full information. The degree of contact shared between birth parents, adoptive parents and the adopted child will be based on needs, consistent with the child's welfare. Adoptive families and children have a right to a secure and stable relationship.

The new legislation should enable more flexible custody arrangements. We suggest three new options:

- A shared parenting agreement that would permit the voluntary division of custody and care responsibilities between the legal custodians and the government. The division of responsibilities, service requirements and timeframes would be negotiated to meet the unique needs of each child and family.
- Youth between 16 and the age of majority should be able to apply for self-custody through an adjudicated process. Self-custody means that these youth would be given adult status, while retaining legal restrictions such as

the inability to vote or consume alcohol. If granted self-custody, they would have full financial and legal responsibility for themselves.

- Group custody must be an option so that a band, clan, kinship network or extended family can obtain custody of a child to allow the child to remain in the culture of origin.

The role of the Superintendent of Family and Child Service must be redefined. Currently the Superintendent is responsible for administering the *Family and Child Service Act* and has custodial responsibility for children in care. The Superintendent also has a role as a child advocate. In the future, the Superintendent should retain all administrative and custodial functions but the advocacy function should be fulfilled by an external Family and Child Advocacy Office. This separation of powers will make advocacy more effective and avoid current conflict of interest problems.

Guardianship - Recommendations

1. Common law meanings of "guardianship of the person of the child" should be abolished to prevent legal disputes over conflicting meaning. In new legislation, the term "guardianship of the person" must be eliminated and other related provincial legislation follow suit in stages.
2. The term "kinship" must be defined as the significant bond between birth families and their children and be included in the new legislation.
3. The term "custody" must be defined as the total responsibility for the well-being of the child and be included in the new legislation.
4. The term "care" must be defined as the authority to meet the day-to-day needs of the child and be included in the new legislation.
5. Provision must be made for shared parenting agreements in the new legislation.
6. The term "adoption" must be defined as the life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship, which is the bond between the child and the birth family.
7. Adoption, as defined in this report, must be incorporated into new legislation following a thorough review of all issues related to adoption. This review and integration must not delay the new legislation.
8. The option of self-custody must be available to youth from the age of 16 years to the age of majority through an adjudicated process and a review must be conducted concerning appropriate criteria and suitability tests for self-custody.

9. The new legislation must enable groups to obtain custody.
10. The term "Superintendent" must be replaced by "Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services".
11. The Ministry of Social Services must place all administrative functions, including custodial authority and service provision, with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services.
12. An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases on a regional basis.

Dispute Resolution

"Remove [the] win/lose approach to conflict resolution. Family relationships need win/win solutions or everyone loses."

Lawyer

Families feel extremely vulnerable when their abilities to care for children are questioned. This feeling of vulnerability is compounded by the "win/lose" manner in which child protection matters are decided in the courts. There is a social stigma associated with the courts because of the belief that courts are for criminals. Language is another barrier. Not only is the language of court hearings technical and unfamiliar, it is inadequate for families who are not fluent in English or who do not express family concepts in English.

There are many types of dispute resolution methods. At the natural support level, families and children seek advice or a listening ear from people they know and trust. Sometimes, the family is unaware of how to get access to other community-based support systems. These families usually seek what we call "voluntary support". Voluntary support involves seeking advice or counsel from trained professionals chosen by the family. Mediation is part of this voluntary support system. In mediation, two parties agree to try to find the common ground between them in an environment that attempts to equalize the power imbalance. A mediator facilitates discussions but decision-making rests with the parties involved. Mediation must be available to families on their own initiative as a way of resolving internal family disputes, service disputes and other disputes between families, caregivers and social workers. It cannot be used to find facts. Victims of family violence should not be forced to enter a process that has the potential to further victimize them.

Currently, some child protection disputes can only be resolved through adjudication by the court system. A judge imposes a decision on all parties. Because of the many problems associated with the courts, we have concluded that an alternative to the court system is required in child protection disputes. We believe that a community tribunal can successfully address the problems plaguing the court system.

Community tribunals will be set up as administrative tribunals. They will deal with two major child protection matters: child protection decisions, and dispositions, and applications for self custody. Community tribunals will replace the current family court system in child protection matters.

The benefits of a community tribunal are many. Among other advantages, it is a dispute resolution mechanism that has the potential to be: conducted in a non-adversarial manner; non-criminal in language and procedures; timely; reflective of specific cultural realities; able to share decision making responsibilities with communities; and adaptable to community needs and preferences.

Dispute Resolution - Recommendations

1. The structure of all dispute resolution mechanisms must recognize and respect the special vulnerability of families and be as non-adversarial as possible.
2. The Ministry of Social Services must respect and work with the available natural support network of families to resolve disputes.
3. Government must make mediation services available to resolve disputes.
4. The results of the Mediation Pilot Project must form the basis for the development and implementation of the government's family and child mediation service with special reference to standards, practices and qualifications of mediators.
5. The Ministry of Education must include dispute resolution training in its family living curriculum.
6. Community tribunals, constituted as administrative tribunals, must be established to replace the court system in all child protection disputes.
7. Legislation must give community tribunals the authority to make decisions for child protection matters and self-custody.
8. Forms of community tribunals must be developed, implemented and evaluated in selected communities within the province and then permanently constituted for all communities throughout the province by 1995.

Child Protection

"The issue is not whether the government will intervene. It will. The question is whether it will intervene for enhancement and prevention, or whether it will respond to breakdown problems...alone."

Advocacy organization

When children's safety is at stake, government must intervene, but intervene in a humane manner that recognizes and reduces the trauma involved. The investigative approach that has evolved has demoralized families and staff and alienated the community. This must change.

The current *Family and Child Service Act* uses many adversarial, criminalizing terms that must be replaced with terms that are more appropriate and less blaming.

Because government involvement in family life usually begins when an allegation of abuse or neglect is made, many people have called for precise definitions of the terms "abuse" and "neglect" in the new legislation. We believe that precise and therefore limiting definitions may work against families, rather than helping get the services they need. We have identified important characteristics that must guide the creation of definitions in the new legislation. These are described in our recommendations.

The obligation to report abuse or neglect is a moral and ethical responsibility. The major issue is how social workers respond to these reports. Social workers have only two options for responding to these calls: determining that the report does not require government involvement, or beginning a child protection inquiry. A third option must be available: family support services must be offered to ensure that families' needs are met before crisis situations develop.

All of these concerns underscore the need to assign the most highly skilled social workers, with the most expertise, experience and cultural competence to child protection work. Social workers have an obligation to assess and offer all the appropriate support services they feel are necessary to keep the family together and free from harm. The Ministry of Social Services must ensure that these services are available.

Witnessing family violence hurts children. These children need support and help, but assistance must not further victimize them or non-abusing family members. There must be provision in the new legislation to remove the offender, not the child. Further, a variety of resources and services must be available to these families to ensure that they can live free of harm.

Alternatives to removal must be explored. Families and children must have a say in this process. We have introduced the concept of family conferences to ensure that their voices are heard. A family conference brings together the significant people in the child and the family's life for the purpose of developing a plan to ensure the child's safety. It allows them to come up with alternatives themselves, rather than having decisions imposed on them. We believe that a coordinator employed by government must be available to families to assist them with organizing the conference. A family

conference can take place at any point during a child protection inquiry, but it must take place before any request for removal is adjudicated. If the family chooses not to hold a conference, the social worker must then organize an involved persons meeting. The concept is the same, except that the social worker arranges the meeting.

No single issue sparked more emotion from families than the fact that children are removed from their homes before hearings have taken place. This has meant that firm plans for the child's future care are not in place when the removal occurs, and that families and children are left in limbo while the matter is settled in the courts. We have proposed that a community tribunal will replace the court system in child protection matters (see chapter, *Dispute Resolution*). Secondly, in all but emergency situations, matters will be decided before removal can occur. We have defined emergencies as situations that expose children to extreme, imminent harm or life-threatening situations. In these cases, removal must be immediate. In both emergency and non-emergency situations, however, we have proposed an adjudication procedure that is more timely and respectful of the needs of children and families. This procedure is described in our recommendations.

We are greatly concerned about the exploitation and abuse of children that occurs on the street. Child prostitution is a major issue. We believe the Ministry of Attorney General must ensure that abusers are dealt with by enforcing the current legislation regarding exploitation of children. The Ministry of Social Services must shift its focus from assisting in the investigations of these matters to supporting the families and children involved.

Child Protection - Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education must take primary responsibility for dealing with issues concerning school attendance.
2. The creation of specific definitions of abuse and neglect must always reflect the characteristics of harm, abuse of power and exploitation.
3. Any definitions created must acknowledge the fact that physical, sexual and emotional abuse usually occur in combination.
4. In any definition of neglect, systemic neglect and parental/caregiver neglect must be differentiated.
5. The creation of definitions must start with a clear statement of their purpose and intent, and that definitions be age-related and respectful of community standards.

6. The new legislation must use the following terms:
 - "remove" and "removal" in place of "apprehend" and "apprehension";
 - "inquiry" in place of "investigation"; and
 - "in need of mandatory service" in place of "in need of protection".
7. The new legislation must include provisions for removing the offender in all situations of abuse.
8. There must be increased support, both within the home and within community programs, for children and family members who are victims of abuse.
9. When calls from the community are received, there must be legislation enabling the social worker to make one of three decisions: no further involvement, begin a child protection inquiry, or offer a family service, either directly or in collaboration with the community.
10. Criteria must be developed to assess social workers' skill and competence in the area of child protection. Receiving delegated authority to conduct an inquiry must be dependent upon meeting these skill and competence criteria.
11. Child protection inquiries must be conducted in a culturally appropriate/sensitive manner and in the language preferred by the family.
12. Government must provide the appropriate communication assistance to all families involved in a child protection inquiry.
13. The Ministry of Social Services must develop standards, policies and procedures that reflect and respect the principles of this report.
14. In cases where it has been determined that a child is at risk and some form of intervention is required, social workers must be obligated to assess and offer all appropriate support services they deem necessary to keep the family together and free from harm, and that the Ministry of Social Services be obligated to ensure that those services are available.
15. Family conferences/involved persons meetings must be available at any stage of a child protection inquiry.
16. An independent coordinator must be charged with overseeing and facilitating these meetings.
17. Before a request for a non-emergency removal is made, a family conference or involved persons meeting must have taken place.

- 18.** The new legislation must define emergencies as situations that expose a child to extreme or imminent harm, or life-threatening circumstances.
- 19.** In all but emergency situations, child protection matters must be adjudicated before removal can occur.
- 20.** In emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal within 24 hours of removing the child. The tribunal must make a same-day (no adjournments allowed) decision as to whether the removal was warranted or not.
- 21.** If the removal was warranted, the tribunal must approve a short-term plan for the child's care pending a full hearing, which must commence within 14 days.
- 22.** In non-emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal for an initial hearing to determine whether further intervention is required. Within 24 hours, the community tribunal must decide whether the child can remain in the home until a full hearing is completed, or if the child needs to be removed. A full hearing must commence within 14 days.
- 23.** Whenever removal and/or ongoing involvement is deemed necessary, a full plan must be developed that meets the legal test of being the "least detrimental alternative" for the child.
- 24.** All plans must be subject to immediate reviews by the community tribunal, which may be initiated by any involved party, including the child.
- 25.** The community tribunal must be responsible for ensuring that children do not "drift" within the social services system. Therefore, reviews must be conducted twice a year, with dates being set according to the child's needs.
- 26.** The Ministry of Attorney General must make every effort possible to ensure that all laws dealing with child exploitation are enforced.
- 27.** The Ministry of Social Services must take responsibility for providing support and protection to children exposed to all forms of out-of-home abuse.

- 28.** The new legislation must contain the following provisions:
 - All people have the responsibility to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.
 - The privacy of the reporter will be maintained wherever possible.
 - People who make reports in good faith will not be personally liable.
- 29.** A training package on family violence and child abuse and neglect issues must be developed for community groups and professionals. Staff of the Ministry of Social Services should offer this program on a comprehensive basis throughout the province.
- 30.** The Ministry of Social Services must work with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the Ministry of Education to ensure that family violence and child abuse and neglect issues become part of the university and college curricula for all related professions.
- 31.** The Ministry of Social Services must work with professional organizations such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons to ensure that the responsibility to report becomes part of the ethical code of conduct and practice.

Alternative Care

"We all want to help kids heal and grow. Can we not do it as a large extended family, with continuity and consistency and hope instead of like a group of adults who don't know each other's names, trying to manoeuvre a larger group of kids through a maze that's supposed to be their life?"

Foster parent

At any given time in British Columbia, about 6000 young people, from infants to teenagers are "in care". Alternative care means any arrangement made by government that places or supports young people outside their families. The term covers many different arrangements such as foster homes, group homes and specialized child care resources, but not correctional institutions.

Children of all ages need attachments to people and places, yet current child protection systems fail to provide the continuity, stability and the love that permits and nurtures these attachments. Continuity and stability are crucial in four areas:

- family relationships: maintain children within their family or at least, maintain the connection with immediate and/or extended family.
- in residence and caregivers: whenever possible, government should attempt to support children where they live rather than move them somewhere else.
- social workers
- personal history: government and those who provide care must honour and help preserve each individual's personal history, and safeguard any mementos.

Families and young people need expanded options for alternative care. These options are covered in five broad categories:

- Family care is the preferred situation, in which the young person remains with their existing family. Government may provide support services if necessary.
- In family-arranged care a family finds an alternative caregiver. Government may provide support services if necessary.
- Family-initiated/government-supported care is a shared parenting agreement in which the family plays the primary role in choosing where the child is going to live.
- In government-initiated/family-supported care, the government takes greater responsibility when a family is unable to provide care. The social worker must ensure the family's participation to the extent they are capable and willing.

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- In government-provided care the government takes full responsibility and provides the necessary alternative care in the absence of family.

Currently, most alternative care falls into the government-initiated and government-provided categories. An objective of the new legislation should be to shift the focus to greater family involvement and decision-making power. It also involves building an individual placement plan around the individual child.

We heard many reports from young people about abuse they suffered during the time they were in care. We believe that government has an obligation to youth who were abused while in care to ensure:

- treatment;
- compensation;
- support during any legal process arising from the abuse;
- help in pressing charges against the abuser; and
- an apology from the government.

As a safeguard, child advocate service must be available to every child or youth in alternative care or while receiving support services.

British Columbia currently has no government-wide standards for alternative care. Each ministry, and indeed many individual programs, have their own standards and regulations. Consistent, government-wide standards must be created for alternative care.

Post-care services must be created to meet the individual needs of young people who are leaving care until they reach age 24.

Alternative Care - Recommendations

1. Continuity and stability of care must be adopted both as a goal and as a guiding principle in alternative care. This should include continuity and stability in family relationships, in residence and caregivers, and in social workers.
2. Mechanisms must be created to allow young people who have been in care together to keep track of each other once they are separated or leave alternative care.
3. Mechanisms must be created to help social workers and caregivers to stay in touch with the young people who have been their responsibilities.
4. Efforts and resources must be made to collect and preserve the personal history of each young person in care.

5. Government must provide more options for family support in order to permit young people to stay in their existing family and community networks.
6. Government must develop options that maximize the participation of families in planning alternative care, and in maintaining ties with their children while they are in alternative care.
7. Social workers must be required to investigate all possible options that use family and community networks before using government-provided options.
8. Government must design an option that allows for multi-party agreements on alternative care among families, children, caregivers, social workers and all other interested parties.
9. Young people who are abused while in government care must be offered treatment, compensation and support during any legal process arising from the abuse.
10. Every child or youth in alternative care or receiving support services must be offered the services of the Family and Child Advocacy Office.
11. Mechanisms must be developed that allow young people to speak, on a regular basis and without fear of retribution, about the alternative care resources in which they live.
12. A single set of inter-ministerial standards must be created for all child and youth care facilities developed, operated or contracted by the government.
13. Post-care Services must be available to all young people leaving the Child in Care system at the age of majority.
14. Post-care Services must be comprehensive and include all programs and services available to young people in care.
15. Post-care Services must be based on the individual needs of the young person and their families, and may include alternative caregivers.

Staff

"Some of the worst tragedies related to our work with children have been the result of a lack of contact. To view the child protection service workers as simply a 'broker' or 'case manager' leaves many children at high risk."

Social worker

We believe that providing direct services to families is the most important work in the Ministry of Social Services. Many staff felt that they were unable to devote adequate time to families and children because of overly demanding responsibilities, unsupportive senior management, lack of resources, and too much paperwork.

The Ministry must move towards assigning work on the basis of the amount of effort required to do the job. This must be carried out by increasing the number of staff rather than moving staff.

Because of the nature of their work, especially removal of children from families and decisions concerning eligibility for financial assistance, staff are uniquely vulnerable to negative public attitudes. The public, as a result, is often dissatisfied with service levels and may even blame system-related problems on staff. Staff often feel that they are scapegoats for a system that is not working very well.

The ministry must address the issue of staff vulnerability by shifting the focus of family and child services to support, rather than intervention, and by eliminating the system-related problems that bring staff into conflict with the public.

Employment equity is an important issue because our diverse communities must feel that their make-up is reflected by the people who assist them. The disabled, visible minorities and aboriginal people have been under-represented in the Ministry of Social Services as in the rest of government. Women, while over-represented numerically within the Ministry, represent only 40% of the supervisory and management level positions.

Families from ethnic and native backgrounds complained that staff often did not understand their cultural heritage and that they were insensitive to their needs. They felt that the lack of staff from their culture created barriers to service. Additionally, families from ethnic backgrounds routinely encountered difficulties with language and cross-cultural communication. The disabled have major difficulties obtaining access to services.

Through employment equity the government must ensure that community make-up will be reflected by staff and all staff will have equal opportunities for advancement.

Although the government is attempting to address equity issues through forthcoming legislation, these changes have been too long in coming. The government must redress the inequities within its system by correcting past injustices and by ensuring through policy that no one group is privileged over any other.

Current hiring practices value academic credentials more highly than knowledge gained through experience or familiarity with the local community and its needs. As a

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result, opportunities for hiring local, multi-culturally sensitive and knowledgeable staff are often lost. The use of competency-based selection criteria will correct this without lowering hiring standards.

Training for family and child service staff is lacking at all levels. The current three week entry level training for Ministry social workers that focuses on conducting child protection investigations is inadequate. Both entry level and on-going training must be given a much higher priority and greater support by senior management.

Staff - Recommendations

1. Staff planning must be long-term and based on integrated supply and demand research.
2. A mechanism must be implemented to include child and family services staff in all decision-making related to staff and workload rationalization, resource allocation and training.
3. The Ministry of Social Services must simplify its administrative requirements and ensure that they focus on the needs of the family instead of the needs of the organization.
4. The Ministry of Social Services must provide healthy working environments, including the necessary equipment and information to meet the service needs of families and children.
5. The Ministry of Social Services must ensure that any systems or structures set up to audit or review staff decisions or to respond to complaints about cases comply with the principles of administrative fairness and have external accountability.
6. An ongoing public education campaign concerning the role of Ministry of Social Services' staff must be initiated.
7. The Ministry of Social Services must take an active role in addressing and responding to public and media concerns.
8. A thorough review of recruitment, hiring and promotion criteria must be undertaken and all systemic barriers to equity must be eliminated.
9. The Ministry of Social Services must actively recruit and hire more disabled, Aboriginal and visible minority staff and all hiring practices must take the pluralistic nature of society into account.
10. The Ministry of Social Services must review its promotion policies and practices to ensure that the pluralistic nature of society is reflected at all levels of operation.
11. The Ministry of Social Services must provide all the necessary supports to allow disabled people to hold positions as appropriate in the organization.

12. All Ministry of Social Services communications must be inclusive of minorities and provide a positive role model for the rest of government and the private sector.
13. The Ministry of Social Services must adopt a policy of competency-based hiring. This policy must recognize knowledge of the local community and other related work experience, as well as academic qualifications.
14. The Ministry of Social Services must develop a certification program that will give formal recognition to all family and child welfare workers. This certification must:
 - describe the requirement of competency-based standards in family and children's services;
 - be developed with the full participation of all consumers;
 - allow accreditation for completed competency-based training;
 - ensure that training for competency-based standards is readily available throughout the province; and
 - become known to the general public.
15. The Ministry of Social Services must increase the availability of general and recruiting information in languages other than English, and of information directed specifically toward under-represented groups.
16. Professional training in child welfare must be central to social work education at the university and college level.
17. Universities and colleges must initiate cooperative education programs to provide students with practical work experience in the family and child welfare field.
18. The Ministry of Social Services must provide an intensive, full-time training program of at least six months for all entry-level positions prior to assuming workload responsibilities.
19. Ongoing generalist training courses must be developed to increase skill levels and to provide staff with information on social issues that affect their work (e.g., poverty, multiculturalism and Native issues).
20. Cross-cultural and anti-racism training must be an integral part of all training for all Ministry of Social Services' staff.
21. In addition to Ministry of Social Services staff, community and consumer representatives must be included in the development of training programs.

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"The Rainbow"
graphically depicts our
hope for the future —
a future of support,
respect and harmony
among our communi-
ties, our families and
our children. It was
created to illustrate
*Making Changes:
A Place To Start.*

British Columbia artist
Sharon Smith was born in
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**Report of the
Community Panel
Family and Children's Services
Legislation Review in
British Columbia**

October 1992

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data
Community Panel, Family and Children's Services
Legislation Review in British Columbia.
Making changes, a place to start

ISBN 0 - 7718 - 9297 - 7

1. Children - Legal status, laws, etc. - British
Columbia. 2. Child welfare - British Columbia. I. Title.

KEB418 . 5 . C55C65 1992 344 . 711'0327 C92-092389 - 5
KF3735 . C65 1992

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

October 19, 1992

The Honourable Joan Smallwood
Minister of Social Services
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia
V8V 1X4

Dear Minister:

We are grateful, as Community Panel members, to have been called upon to participate in a truly significant process of change. We are privileged to have the opportunity to bring the collective "voice" of the people of British Columbia to your attention.

The community panel process, which you chose, has both strength and complexity. It has allowed for our differences in background and knowledge to be used in describing the needs of families and children. The process has demanded an openness to new ideas and a challenge to our preconceived solutions. By combining these forces and by making it a public process, you guaranteed that all views were heard and considered. The strength, the complexity and therefore our conclusions reflect the very nature of the process chosen.

The Aboriginal members of the Community Panel assisted us in developing the Honour Code that guided our process. They conducted a parallel process that is viewed by all of our members as equal but separate, consistent with their traditions and future aspirations.

Our travels throughout the province have reinforced our awareness of the beauty and richness of this land and the warmth and acceptance of its people. Many people shared experiences that were painful, private and sometimes devastating. These reflections challenged us to look beyond individual solutions.

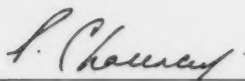
At the community level, the process generated hard work, creativity, debate and expectations for change. The inclusive nature of the process was recognized and appreciated by many who are traditionally excluded, namely youth, parents, marginalized and isolated communities, and ethno-cultural groups.

Many stories were presented of experiences that were full of anguish and despair. Parents whose families had been destroyed, young people who had been abused, social workers who felt trapped . . . the examples are endless. There is a fear that nothing will change, that voices will go unheard and that input will have no value. Throughout all of these stories was the hope of change — ideas and recommendations to ensure a better future for British Columbia families. We heard many times "this won't help me, but I hope it will prevent this from happening to others."

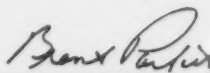
MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

Having heard the voice of the people, we have concluded that new attitudes and directions are necessary. The problems identified and the recommendations proposed are a package. The needs of communities, families and children cannot be carved into pieces. Neither can the family and child welfare system. To do so will lead to further confusion and heartache. Therefore, our report should be received as an integrated approach to change.

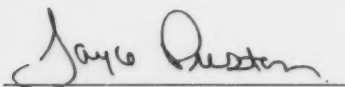
We, the Community Panel, respectfully submit our report to you, with the belief and hope that the government and the people of our province will work together to reclaim our communities, where families and children are safe and healthy and where there is justice for all.



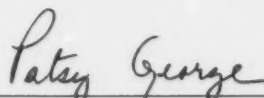
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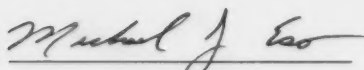
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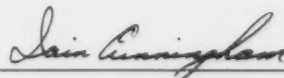
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Acknowledgements

The Community Panel wishes to acknowledge all the individuals who came forward to tell their stories and share their ideas. Many relived personal pain in order to make this contribution and this is both respected and appreciated.

Young people made a significant contribution to our perspective and understanding of the issues. Their moving and at times troubling presentations shaped major portions of this work.

We visited communities in all parts of this beautiful and vast province. People everywhere opened their hearts, showed that they cared and gave us hope for the future.

Staff of the Ministry of Social Services in all regions shared their unique perspectives and gave us thoughtful suggestions about necessary changes.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge and give heartfelt thanks to the staff who provided invaluable support to the Community Panel. From research requests that had to be produced in impossible time frames to the logistics of a "travelling road show of 10", long hours were worked and adaptations were made to our ever-changing schedules — all to support the production of this report.

We had the privilege and pleasure of working with Ms. Freda MacLellan, whose input shaped much of the work in this report.

We want to add a note of personal appreciation to our own families and the sacrifices they have made over the past year that allowed us to complete this important work. Families and children belong to everyone. We hope that in this report we have reflected this belief. We hope that you hear your "voice," which you so willingly shared with us.

Thank you.

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

The Community Panel wishes to give special thanks to the following people:

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Introduction



5.

Introduction:

A Place to Start

In November 1991, the Honourable Joan Smallwood, Minister of Social Services, appointed the Community Panel to review child protection legislation in British Columbia. The Minister asked us to travel throughout the province to hear a broad range of opinions about child welfare, and to make recommendations for change.

The Minister asked the Community Panel to prepare a public report by October 1992 that would provide the framework for new child protection legislation in British Columbia.

Throughout our travels around the province, we were pleased with the high level of interest, the creative thinking and the seemingly inexhaustible store of ideas people presented to us.

While some told us that they felt our current child welfare laws and structures worked well, or at best require only modest improvements, most described the need for major change.

Families told us of being frightened and threatened by a child welfare structure they thought should have provided help and support. Families also told us that all too often problems had to reach crisis proportions before help could be obtained.

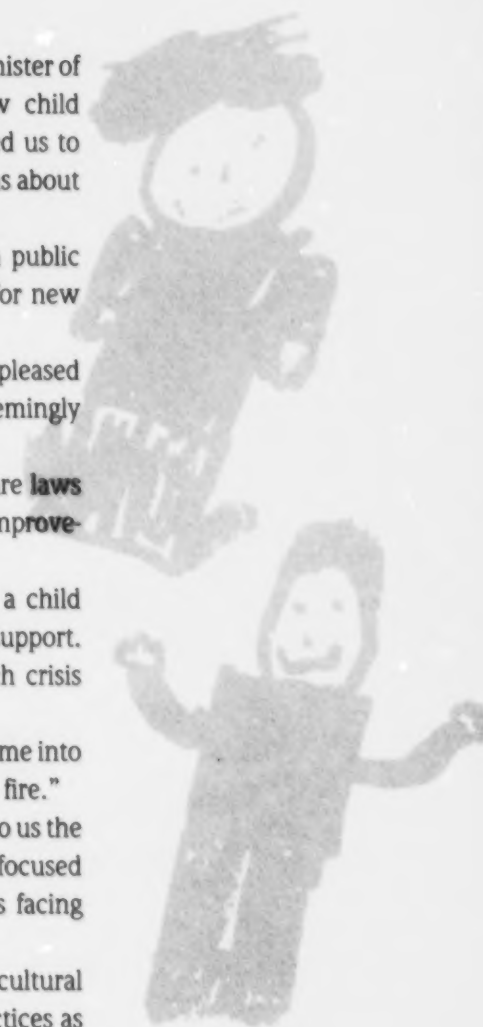
Young people said the experience of being moved from home into government care was "like going from the frying pan into the fire."

Ministry staff, service providers and caregivers described to us the feelings of frustration and isolation. They said the "system" is focused on symptoms, not on the underlying causes of the problems facing families and children.

Community representatives, especially those from ethno-cultural groups, described current child protection structures and practices as being out of touch with their needs and often discriminatory.

In writing this report we have tried to be conscious of the cultural and racial diversity of the people who make up our province. We see the need to preserve and enhance our pluralistic heritage and to work for equality.

All of us belong to a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual and multireligious province where no one group should be more privileged than any other. We have attempted to reflect this theme throughout this report. The individual and collective rights and obligations of all of us can be realized only when there is equality and justice for all. Racism, sexism and classism continue to create barriers that prevent equal access to programs and services. We must become inclusive of all



people by adopting cross-cultural, non-racist and non-discriminatory policies and practices.

We do not claim that this report will provide all the answers to some very large and complicated problems. We do feel, however, that this report can serve as a starting point for the development of stronger and healthier communities for families, children, youth — for all of us.

We have made three types of recommendations:

- in some areas we have identified a specific problem, and are recommending a specific solution;
- in other areas we have identified a problem and have recommended a range of options, or a process for further consideration; and
- in a small number of areas we have identified a subject where we only have questions without framing either specific problems **or** solutions. These are areas where we recommend further study.

There are many things that this report is **not**. It is not a research paper, though we did commission research on specific topics. It makes no claim to providing the recipe for fixing all that ails our child welfare system. It does not respond to each and every problem, comment or suggestion we heard.

The members of the Community Panel have been united by one common theme and one common goal — to **listen** to the people and communities of this province and to provide a **voice** for people and communities to speak to government. The road for us has not always been easy — the issues under consideration strike at the very heart of the relationships among families, children and their governments.

This report is about our attempt to capture the significant threads and common issues that communities told us needed immediate and long-term change.

We hope that we have done justice to what we have heard.

Guiding principles

The following principles have guided our work and must form the basis for change:

Dignity and respect

All people are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.

Inclusiveness

We are a pluralist society and there must be equality for all people.

Equality can only be achieved by the removal of historic barriers within the system.

Freedom from abuse

All people have a right to live free from abuse. Government has a special obligation to protect vulnerable members of society, especially children.

Involvement

Individuals must be involved in all decisions that affect their lives.

Communities must be allowed and assisted to play their vital and supportive role in the lives of families and children.

Continuity and stability

The bond between birth families and their children is never extinguished.

Each individual has a right to continuity of relationships, and to their religious and cultural heritage.

Equity

The goal of government programs must be to ensure equity for individuals, families and communities.

Close to home

Services must be community based, coordinated and integrated.





Poverty

*"There are more
lost years from
poverty in Canada
than from cancer.
We don't know
how to end cancer
yet, but poverty can
be ended."*

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST



Poverty

Principles

We believe:

- Poverty is the number one problem facing families, children and youth today. The eradication of poverty in **all its forms** should be a major focus of government policy **at all levels**.
- Poverty is a child welfare issue and when **governments** allow children to live in poverty, they are, in effect, **committing** systemic child neglect.

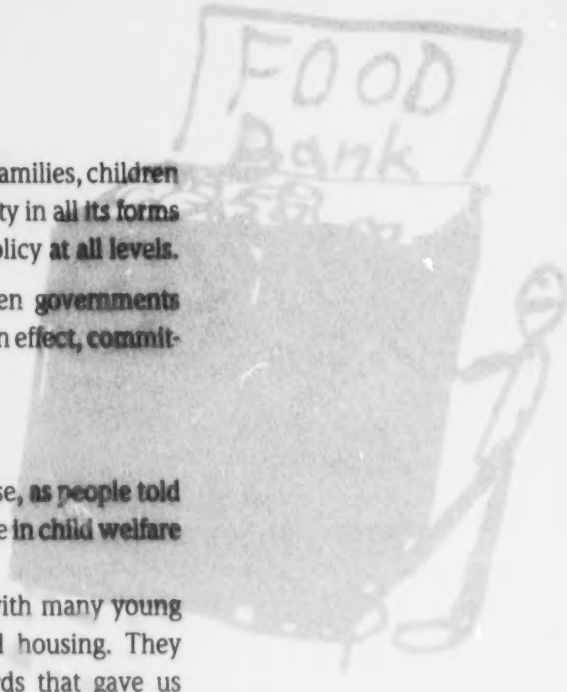
Perspective

We chose this chapter to begin our report because, **as people told us from Victoria to Fort Nelson, the greatest single issue in child welfare is poverty.**

In all parts of this wealthy province, we met with many young people who told us they were hungry and needed housing. They described both their present and their past in words that gave us uncomfortable insight into the pain of growing up poor.

Looking back on their childhood, they said they were forced to grow up too fast and to assume responsibilities that no child is equipped to shoulder. While other children slept soundly in secure family homes, they lay awake worrying about eviction notices, empty food cupboards, and parents worn down by the stress of survival. They grew up angry, blaming their parents for not providing for them. Going to school without proper clothing or school supplies, they were targets of bigotry and discrimination that increased with every year of their young lives. And worst of all, they said— worse than the deprivation and discrimination and the thousand and one other injuries and insults that go with being poor—poverty left them with unshakable feelings of being neglected, unloved and worthless.

Parents talked of poverty in different but equally powerful terms. For them, poverty is never having quite enough of anything and always being afraid that because of it, they'll lose their health, their home, or, worst of all, their children. They described their worries about not being able to keep their children safe and not having enough food or sufficient clothes for them. They spoke of their anguish when their children went



"The feeling that we were poor added to the neglect and abuse I felt as a child."

Public health nurse

"Poverty impairs full human development. Rising poverty in families, particularly in single-parent households, both impairs education success and places children at risk in a wider sense. The provincial government must ensure that its funding of public education, its housing programs, its health-care programs, and its financial support to needy families are more than poverty-perpetuating."

Teacher

"How many children might stay at home if we were to provide the money and service support that we see as appropriate for foster or other care?"

Social worker

into care, and of a different anguish when the children returned to find nothing had changed at home. Life was still precarious, and there was still not enough of anything.

Parents stressed over and over again that they do not choose to live in poverty but that with high unemployment, low income assistance, and a seemingly endless number of administrative barriers in their way, they could not escape. Many said they feel victimized by a system that sets parenting standards so high as to be almost impossible to meet when living in poverty.

We learned that at least one person works in the majority of low-income families. Some of them work at minimum wage or in low-paying jobs that do not provide enough for them to get by. Other parents are unemployed and want to find jobs, but can't. This is not for lack of trying, they said. The idea that there is opportunity for everyone to work is clearly a myth when the average unemployment rate in B.C. hovers around ten percent, and is much higher in many parts of the province.

Teachers and nurses told us of poverty's impact on the children and youth they see every day in their work. They see it pull families apart and force people out of their homes. Many of the poor children they work with suffer from ill health. In the most extreme cases, poverty contributes to senseless and tragic early death.

Ministry staff spoke to us of their concern about the rising numbers of people forced onto welfare. Even with income assistance, they said, they knew of many cases in which people lack essentials such as food or bedding. Staff talked of the stress common to low-income parents, and indicated that stress can lead to neglect and abuse. They pointed out that a disproportionate number of children who enter the care of the B.C. government are from low-income families, and enter care because of neglect. Speaking personally, staff voiced their frustration at being unable to provide the material things these families need to survive and stay together.

In summary, poverty is a serious child welfare issue with a powerful impact on a large segment of the population. The message we heard from British Columbians was clear: the government cannot ignore poverty if all children in this province are to grow up with dignity and in health.

Issues

In listening to hundreds of people around the province, we found general agreement about what the word poverty means — essentially, poverty means not having enough for the basics of living. There are many arguments to be made around the edges of this definition, but few about its implications for young people and their families.

Article 27 of the United Nations (U.N.) Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada after consultation with all of the provinces, states that every child has a right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. When adequate standards are not met in any one of these five areas, a child is considered to be living in poverty. While the U.N. Convention states that parents or primary caregivers are responsible for securing these conditions, it also states that where this is not possible, the state should assist parents or primary caregivers to meet these basic needs.

The hard truth, however, is that this humane and far-reaching declaration is undermined with each passing day by the realities of global trade and international monetary policy. These arrangements, made far beyond the reach and knowledge of most British Columbians, have direct consequences on employment, living standards, and both national and provincial social policy.

Poverty is one of these consequences. In this chapter, we focus on seven poverty-related issues that arose out of our consultations with communities around the province. Many more issues were raised, and some of them are addressed in other chapters of this report. However, these seven came through strongly as central concerns of many British Columbians.

1. Welfare

The opinions and experiences we heard during the last 11 months convince us that the welfare system does not come close to addressing the damage poverty does to children and to their families. We believe that income assistance programs are not worthy of the name if they do not bring families up to a level of income that allows them to live in health, security and dignity.

We have heard the current welfare system in Canada described as "business-oriented" welfare. According to this analysis, income assistance programs serve to reduce poor people's bargaining power with employers and government, and force them into low-paying jobs.

There are many income assistance programs and sub-programs within the welfare system. None of them, individually or collectively, provides enough money for most families to raise their children to a standard that the same system judges to be adequate. Moreover, the already inadequate funding levels within these programs are currently threatened by the recent capping of the federal Canada Assistance Plan, which will cost B.C. \$1.2 billion between 1990 and 1995.

At the same time as income assistance and other social programs are being reduced, charity is being re-introduced as a way to deal with

"Canada, and in particular British Columbia, has more than adequate wealth and resources to meet the needs of its population. The high percentage of children living in poverty is morally indefensible."

————— *Advocacy group*

"Human lives and the future of children are being sacrificed because of the profit motive."

————— *Social policy analyst*

"If you want to increase our sense of self worth, don't buy us expensive service programs; give us the cash to buy what we need."

————— *Welfare advocate*

"Charity is like a band-aid over an amputated arm; it doesn't stop the bleeding."

Activist

poverty. This is a dangerous step backwards from actually helping people in need. While we do not wish to undervalue the work some charities do, charity avoids confronting the causes of poverty. By doing so, it helps poverty to continue.

We learned that new charities open their doors every month in Canada, yet every month hunger and homelessness grow. Despite this, governments and a substantial segment of the public continue to believe that charity is an adequate substitute for social programs. It is definitely not a substitute: rather, it reinforces the policies and programs that keep thousands of families and children in poverty.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. Eradicating poverty in all its forms must be the main focus of a new government policy so that parents or primary caregivers may meet the basic needs of their children.
2. All income support programs must be raised to levels that allow families to provide for their basic needs.

2. Discrimination

Poor children learn earlier than most the cruel fallacy of the nursery rhyme, "Sticks and stones can break my bones/But words will never hurt me."

Of all the hurtful words attached to poverty, "failure" is probably the most pervasive. It is also a singularly powerful word in a society so oriented to success, and that chiefly measures success by material possessions. On an individual level, the personal cost of accepting that "poverty is failure" is the frustration, anger and hopelessness that afflict both children and adults who live in poverty.

However, "failure" is not only a label that poor people wear but one that the rest of the world judges them by. On a societal level, "failure" carries overtones of other hurtful, judgemental words. Presenters told us that these have direct and concrete effects on the lives of poor people. Suspicion closes doors before they even have a chance to knock. We heard that banks refuse them bank accounts, that landlords refuse to rent to them, and that teachers make self-fulfilling assumptions about the lack of potential in students from low-income families. We also heard that many government staff frequently accept these stereotypes, and act accordingly in decisions regarding child welfare.

In their dealings with government, poor people often feel that they are monitored and policed, even though they have committed no crime except trying to survive with too little money. Even at the best of times, they often feel that government staff want to make them "better poor

"My mom and dad were on welfare. We had no money for extra stuff. Everyone in school teased me . . . I was forced to grow up faster. I cried half my childhood away."

Parent

people" rather than helping them get out of poverty.

This discrimination is even more damaging when it applies to visible and linguistic minorities. All of the examples above are common experiences to people with non-mainstream accents and/or skin colours.

We believe that some of this discrimination is the result of ignorance regarding the causes of poverty, and could therefore be rectified by public education. Many people simply do not know that persons with disabilities, single mothers with children and the working poor constitute the majority of individuals living in poverty. They do not know how hard most poor people work to survive and to care for their families.

Attitudes are difficult to change, but we believe that they must be addressed in public policy and programming. Efforts are needed both on a general level and within the government ministries and agencies responsible for child protection and family support.

However, discrimination is also built into many welfare and other social programs. The business orientation of current welfare programming is where this structural discrimination begins, but it can be seen all the way down to program delivery level.

We believe that discrimination against poor people must be addressed both in attitudes and in the language and practice of government programs.

Therefore, we recommend that:

3. The Ministry of Social Services must establish a staff education program regarding the realities of living in poverty.
4. The government must mount public education programs to dispel the myths surrounding people living in poverty.

3. Hunger

One in five children in B.C. lives in poverty. This fact translates into tens of thousands of children who do not have enough food, or the proper food to keep them healthy.

In many cases, the problem begins before birth and continues as the child develops. Impoverished mothers are far more likely to have low birth-weight babies. Some studies indicate that, compared to their more affluent peers, poor children have one and a half times the rate of chronic health problems.

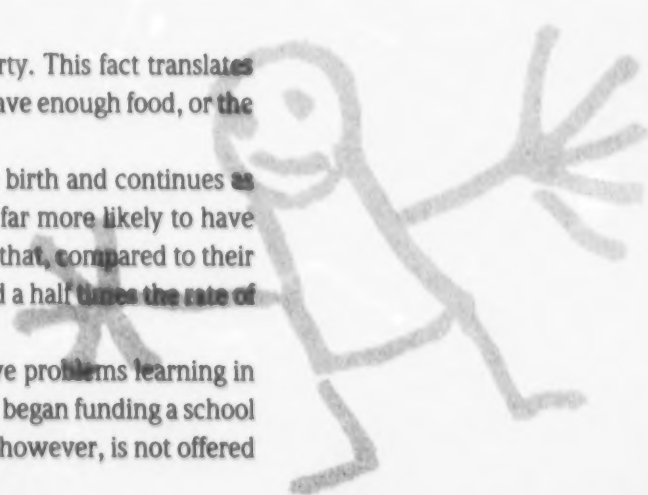
It is well known that hungry children have problems learning in school. To address this, the government of B.C. began funding a school meals program in January 1992. The program, however, is not offered

"She refused me money then leaned across the desk and said compassionately, 'if you have any other problems, be sure to call me'."

Mother

"They say 'if people abuse their kids, then lock them up.' It really is a middle class statement. These people do not know what the 'poverty grinder' is like, and how it lashes out at the kids. Poverty = stress = abuse. The real crime is knowing the cycle is coming and not doing anything about it."

Public health nurse



"Kids always need a little extra (money) for school, for the band, for the club, or just for lunch. Kids will segregate if they don't have the money."

Kids should have a right to participate in things even if they don't have the money."

Teacher

"We need affordable housing, not hotels."

Street youth

"I guesstimated that the cost of courts, lawyers, supervised visits and foster care could have bought my friend the house she needed to raise her kid."

Friend of mother whose child was apprehended

in all school districts and does not reach children who have left or have not yet entered the school system. For children not in school, the best way to assure proper nutrition is to increase their family's income.

We believe that the government must ensure that all children in B.C. receive the food they need to grow up in good health.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 5. Government must maintain and expand school meal programs throughout the province.**

4. Homelessness and inadequate housing

Many people told us that finding adequate and affordable housing is an ongoing struggle. Once they do find housing, there is little security. Rent increases, property sales and disputes with landlords frequently force families into another move.

Though provincial legislation clearly states that landlords must not discriminate, this has only served in some cases to push the discrimination underground. Many landlords and building managers simply will not rent to single mothers, young people, families on income assistance or visible minorities. Advocacy on behalf of tenants is required. This function was fulfilled by the Office of the Rentalsman prior to 1984.

The deeper reasons for these problems are again tied to public policy and programs. Cuts in federal funding for co-op and subsidized housing have resulted in fewer units being available. In some communities, there is no subsidized housing at all. To qualify for what does exist, many people put their names on long waiting lists. While they wait, some families and young people are forced to live in substandard housing. Others spend months in motels (which they then must leave during tourist season). Still others camp or live on the street.

The shortage of housing is particularly frightening for parents, because if they become homeless they face the risk of having their children apprehended. Fearing this above all else, most families cut into the support portion of their welfare cheques to pay the rent. Welfare money is allocated for shelter and support, with the latter applying to food, clothing and transportation.

If children are taken away for reasons other than homelessness, parents on income assistance are faced with a new threat to their shelter needs: as soon as their children are apprehended, their welfare cheques are reduced. With less money at the end of each month, they may have to move to even cheaper accommodation, setting in motion another vicious circle. In order to get their children back they must prove that they can provide adequate housing, but that housing is now beyond their financial reach.

Therefore, we recommend that:

6. The number of social housing units must be increased to provide more accommodation for low-income families.
7. Federal funding for co-op housing must be reinstated.
8. The government must bring back the position of Rentalsman in order to ensure fairness in the rental housing market.

5. People with disabilities

Poverty affects people with disabilities in a disproportionate way. On one hand, they generally have higher transportation, housing and medical costs than able-bodied people. On the other hand, they have fewer opportunities to meet those costs.

Families with a disabled parent or child face extra emotional and financial pressures. In many cases, they need long-term, flexible support services to help them cope. These services are not widely available outside a few urban centres in B.C., and when services are in place, some disabled people have trouble accessing them.

Therefore, we recommend that:

9. Income assistance levels for persons with disabilities must reflect their special needs.
10. Increased income assistance must not affect the eligibility of persons with disabilities for other services and programs.

6. Refugees

There is a growing number of refugees who come to Canada because of persecution in their country of origin. Yet once they arrive here, they and their children face a new set of survival problems.

Unemployment and a lack of social and income support programs make it almost impossible for refugee families to escape the poverty trap. Many live in unsafe surroundings and work at illegal or extremely low-paying jobs. Socially, they are often isolated and the targets of discrimination.

To compound these problems, jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments complicate an already frustrating situation. The result is that Ministry of Social Services staff have few alternatives for meeting the needs of refugees.

We heard about the absurd depths that this can reach in the example of unaccompanied minors who arrive in Canada with notes

"When my kids were apprehended, I lost everything - my house, my car. It made it even harder to get them back."

Mother

"What became clear to me is that there exists an unlimited amount of money for court cost and very little for basic needs and services."

*Mother of disabled child
on welfare*

"Many problems occur because refugees lack information on parenting in Canada. All program and support presently available to English-speaking families must be made accessible to parents who do not speak English."

Latin American

Community member

"I know my kids and I are one pay cheque from the food bank."

Single parent

pinned to them asking for refugee status. No one currently has or is willing to take responsibility for these children. We in this panel cannot play jurisdictional referee and decide which level of government should take responsibility for these children. We strongly state our belief that government has, at the very least, a moral obligation to see that these young people are safe and cared for.

We also believe that all programs and supports available to citizens and landed immigrants should be made available to refugees.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 11. All programs and supports available to citizens and landed immigrants must be made available to refugee families.**

7. Working hard, living poor

The working poor are those who work for a living but still cannot meet their basic needs. These include people who work for minimum wage, below minimum wage, or at a wage inadequate to support their families.

Many presenters told us that being a member of the working poor means constantly living "on the edge". Their level of income is high enough to exclude them from eligibility for many government-subsidized social programs, yet it is often so low that they cannot afford to pay for essentials such as day care or medical coverage for their families.

A number of people in this group work for minimum wage while others, including a large number of young people struggling to support themselves, make even less. Farm labourers and domestics are not covered by minimum wage laws, a situation with special impact on refugees and visible minorities.

Minimum wage was originally designed to help families meet their needs, but its effectiveness has been eroded because of the increase in the cost of living. In 1975, minimum wage was \$2.75 an hour. To have the same purchasing power today, the minimum wage would have to be \$9.22 an hour; in reality, however, it is only \$5.50. We believe that minimum wage must be raised substantially in order to bring the working poor out of poverty.

High levels of unemployment mean that many of the working poor have only a precarious hold on their jobs, which are often seasonal in nature. Currently, only three regions of British Columbia are experiencing economic growth: southern Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland and the Central Okanagan. Outside these three areas, prospects for work remain grim. We believe that regional

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economic development must be a high priority for the government if it wishes to give equal economic opportunities to families and children in all areas of the province.

Therefore, we recommend that:

12. The minimum wage must be tied to a fixed percentage of the average weekly wage, as calculated by Statistics Canada.
13. Minimum wage law must be applied to all workers in British Columbia.

"The government has decided that the shittiest, most dangerous and lowest paid jobs are better for us than welfare. Who benefits?"

Activist

Poverty Recommendations

1. Eradicating poverty in all its forms must be the main focus of a new government policy so that parents or primary caregivers may meet the basic needs of their children.
2. All income support programs must be raised to levels that allow families to provide for their basic needs.
3. The Ministry of Social Services must establish a staff education program regarding the realities of living in poverty.
4. The government must mount public education programs to dispel the myths surrounding people living in poverty.
5. Government must maintain and expand school meal programs throughout the province.
6. The number of social housing units must be increased to provide more accommodation for low-income families
7. Federal funding for co-op housing must be reinstated.
8. The government must bring back the position of Rentalsman in order to ensure fairness in the rental housing market.
9. Income assistance levels for persons with disabilities must reflect their special needs.
10. Increased income assistance must not affect the eligibility of persons with disabilities for other services and programs.
11. All programs and supports available to citizens and landed immigrants must be made available to refugee families.
12. The minimum wage must be tied to a fixed percentage of the average weekly wage, as calculated by Statistics Canada.
13. Minimum wage law must be applied to all workers in British Columbia.



Community Development

*"We need to live
in a place where we
can depend on our
neighbours and
have our neighbours
depend on us."*

COMMUNITY MEMBER



Barry Metcalfe
Barry Metcalfe, age 9



Community Development

Principles

We believe:

- Given adequate resources, communities have within them the capacity to support and protect families, youth and children.
- Communities have the capacity and responsibility to assess and prioritize their needs.
- Government has a responsibility to value and respond to the efforts of communities already working together and to create opportunities for other communities to do so.
- The specific needs and preferences of communities are best served when government's local staff are part of and involved in the communities where they are located.

Perspective

In our consultations around the province, we often heard comments such as "Victoria is a long way away from us." For many communities, family and child services do not seem geared or even relevant to their needs; they feel their opinions are ignored, that they have no alternatives offered them, and that natural community leadership is neither respected nor consulted.

Our community visits around the province were greeted with everything from gratitude to cynicism. Some people were pleased that they were being listened to and asked when we would be back. They wanted to know how to get more involved, now that something seemed to be happening. Others wondered why we had bothered to make the trip; they said they had been "consulted" before and that no action or change had resulted. What good was consultation, they asked, when it seemed to happen only after "Victoria" had already decided what it wanted to do?

People of all ages and from all areas told us that they want the chance to get involved. Young people told us they want opportunities to get involved with community issues such as recreation and anti-drug and alcohol campaigns. Most of all, they no longer want to feel like "invisible" members of their communities.

"The ministry should not have to accept the entire responsibility for the care of families and children in B.C.

There are many other stakeholders in this process.

Let us involve churches, community groups, trade unions, business leaders and other groups in the community in this huge task to support and strengthen our family system."

— Ethnic Community Agency

Parents took the floor in our meetings to say that they want the system to reflect them and their community. They did not want to have to deliver child protection and family support services themselves, but want to be present in planning how services are delivered and what those services will be. This opinion was echoed by members of community groups who said they want the community to have a central role in setting priorities and giving direction to the government.

A different perspective came from caregivers, who complained that communities too often organized themselves around negative actions, particularly those reflecting a "NIMBY" (Not In My Back Yard) attitude to care facilities. Some felt that NIMBY happens because communities are not consulted and have no say in planning. When residents are told that government has decided that there will be a facility in their area, they organize against it as a means of reasserting some local control.

Ministry staff told us they often felt that the administrative hierarchy and the communities in which they work are "worlds apart", and it is difficult to bring those worlds into closer orbit. In fact, they said, they are neither encouraged nor permitted to get involved with their communities. Some said they felt torn by the need to be loyal to their employer, when that employer seemed so out of touch with the needs of the people Ministry staff were hired to serve.

We heard more than once from staff members that the Ministry of Social Services should include community development as part of the social workers' jobs. They felt that permission to put even a few hours a month into community development activities had great potential for strengthening public confidence in their work and creating relationships with their communities.

Issues

Throughout this report, we talk about the community's role in child protection and family support. In this chapter we concentrate on how the voice and participation of communities in these fields can be encouraged and supported. This process is generally called community development.

Community development is difficult to plan, impossible to impose, and, in our opinion, **essential** to the safety and well-being of the province's families and children. The opinions we heard convinced us that the geographic community (neighbourhoods and gathering places) cannot be places of safety unless the human community works together to make them so.

This, for us, is the essence of community development: people coming together in the places where they feel they belong; deciding

what their common needs are; and organizing to meet those needs. It is an ongoing process, and a political one. It shifts decision-making power closer to the people.

People can and do belong to a number of communities at once. These may include: neighbourhoods; professional, religious, social or cultural communities; or communities created by common need. For example, the families of children with disabilities are a community who have found a strong voice for themselves. They have proven to be strong advocates for the needs of their children and have achieved a great deal.

However, the process of community development poses challenges for government since it involves decision-making at local levels, far removed both physically and in mindset from the seats of centralized power. Government is inevitably tempted to pursue its own agenda, by which we mean its definition of problems. It tries through the work of its staff, and the leverage of funding, to impose solutions. Not only does this not work, but it negates the very concept of community development, in which problem definition flows from the community itself.

While the Ministry of Social Services has the primary responsibility for services to families and children, none of its resources are formally directed towards community development. The province's existing community development programs are located in other ministries and agencies, principally the ministries of Health (with its Healthy Communities initiative), Women's Equality, Education, and Economic Development. Since the community level is the best level from which to approach family support and child protection, we believe that government can and must support and expand community development efforts in these fields.

Although we think it is of value in many areas beyond child protection and family support, the panel has chosen not to deal with the broader questions of community development in this report. Instead, we have focused our attention on practical ways in which government can both support and take direction from the efforts of communities to create safe and healthy environments for families.

The panel stresses that financial and other resources are necessary to support such efforts, particularly those organized by disadvantaged communities in our society.

Because there is such diversity in community development, the term is easy to distort. We wish to emphasize that community development is not merely "community consultation". This is too often a sterile exercise in which outside agencies arrive with a prepared list of questions they want answered, which narrowly limits the consultation to their agenda. Nor is it an excuse for government to escape its

"There is a need for broad community involvement in determining needs and for services to be well integrated."

Community member

responsibility to provide resources or services on the grounds that "the community can do it". The government must meet its statutory obligations to deliver services, while accepting the community's entitlement to shape those services.

When a significant amount of decision-making power rests with the community, the government retains a number of responsibilities. Community groups must not make decisions that are illegal or detrimental to children, families or disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, individual communities should not be able to make decisions with sexist or racist implications. There must be an established core of services from which no community can opt out. Broad guidelines and clearly articulated principles will have to be created for community development programs. These guidelines must be developed with the participation of a broad cross-section of community groups.

"Ministry staff require clear guidelines on their role and responsibilities."

Ministry management

1. The role of government staff

Creating a community focus in family support and child protection will not be accomplished by simply creating a number of positions called "community development workers". While there may be new positions necessary, we believe that major changes can be made using existing staff and resources.

The Ministry of Social Services must adopt a new orientation. Staff must have the opportunity to analyze problems from a community perspective and seek community solutions. "Community development" should not be a mere add-on to social workers' already lengthy list of tasks. Rather, social workers must be taught, and then permitted, to look and act beyond the individual case level.

In most cases, staff should be **responsive** to communities. By this we mean that they should respond to community wishes and concerns. As representatives of the social services, they can support community development by providing local groups with information, advice, funding or a channel to higher administrative levels.

In other cases, Ministry of Social Services staff should be **proactive**, particularly in taking on a role as a catalyst or facilitator. To take one example: a Financial Assistance Worker (FAW) knows of several parents in crisis who have never met but live in the same neighbourhood. The FAW helps these parents by providing transportation and day care so that the meeting can take place. However, even in such a proactive role, the FAW must remember to consult and suggest rather than to dictate.

Finally, a change is required in the Ministry of Social Services' attitude towards staff participating as members of their communities. The traditional model of the detached, impartial public servant

is changing in many ways. For instance, it is now widely recognized that public servants have a right to participate in political campaigns. This change should carry over into community participation. Except in cases where there is clear conflict of interest, staff should be permitted to get involved in their communities and should be respected for such involvement.

2. The role of communities

The process of community development allows for each community to plan for its own needs. Communities need ways to conduct this planning and formal mechanisms to present these plans to government in order to access resources. The comments and discussion presented in this section are, for the most part, repeated in the chapter *Support Services*, section 3.

Community planning occurs in a variety of ways. It is the work of individual members of the community, activists and organizers, politicians and planners. It has become a modern feature of municipal government to have some form of city plan. While city plans have been around for a long time, it is only recently that they have included social considerations in addition to land use and transportation plans.

We believe that community development is the way in which planning is effectively done about social issues, especially those relating to families and children. We do not believe that community development or the mechanisms used to develop a community plan come in any single form; rather, they are as unique as the communities they represent. The only common feature is that at the end of the process, a plan is produced that features the support services needed by that community for its families and children.

A community social service needs assessment or plan must recognize existing services, rank the new services required, and include monitoring, review and evaluation functions. All plans are only "snapshots" of the needs of that moment, so they must have the capacity for review and revision.

Finally, the community must have a formal way of communicating their plan (or assessment) to the provincial government. The provincial government should assist with resources to ensure that this planning happens. At the same time, the government retains its obligation to fund community-based support services.

We heard frequently that services are not available in many parts of the province. Clearly, there are inequities that must be addressed. We believe that a more comprehensive planning process involving all communities, and a formal way of presenting these to government, will provide opportunities to redress these inequities.

"... community members are ready to assume more responsibility for meeting the needs of children, and should be empowered to do so."

—— Community organization

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. Communities must be assisted in developing community plans or needs assessments that represent their unique needs for family support services.
2. The provincial government must provide clear mechanisms for communities to present their community needs assessment for funding consideration.

3. Funding for community organizations

Government has traditionally been wary of supporting groups doing community development work on the grounds that they are "political" (both in the partisan sense and in the sense of changing the status quo), that the results of their work are not easily measured, and that, given the chance, communities will make excessive demands on the public purse.

For these reasons, funding of community groups has been largely tied to those delivering direct service. This has been particularly noticeable for the past fifteen years, during which time the government has consciously shifted funding from broad-based community organizations to direct service providers. Other groups, despite their legitimate and positive roles within their communities, have had to struggle to survive on donations — especially the donation of volunteer labour.

Our travels around the province convinced us that the public service must keep itself open to communities, even when they are "noisy" and demanding. A "bunker mentality" solves nothing and helps no one. We believe that government should be more open to constructive criticism, and that the more supportive and open the government becomes at the local level, the more constructive that criticism will be.

We believe that a new orientation must include these community groups. This would recognize their value as sources of information about community needs and for their expressions of local preferences. It would recognize and meet the communities' needs for resources in order to carry on their work.

4. The role of the province

Several changes are necessary at the provincial and ministry levels to allow the full potential of communities to be realized in family support. The main changes are:

- creation of attitudes, at all levels of government, that understand and support community development;
- creation of an inter-ministry mechanism, with community

"... that the province support communities in their community building efforts by assisting with resources necessary to develop a process for democratic participation."

Advocacy group



MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

representation and a finite time frame, to create a work plan and to monitor progress; and

- provision of resources to support community organizations.

We believe that ministries with responsibilities to provide services to families and children should adopt a community development orientation. In practical terms, this will include creating within each ministry a unit with the mandate to follow through on the new orientation, to propose new programs and identify opportunities, to coordinate with other ministries, and to monitor progress.

This unit would also act as an ongoing, high-level bridge to the communities from the Ministry. We emphasize, however, that this unit would not "do" community development. It would not replace, much less control, the even more important community-level work of the Ministry's local offices.

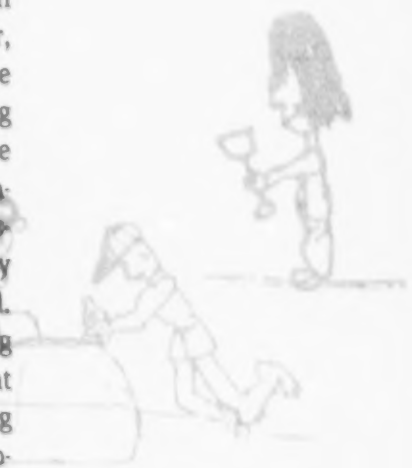
We see this unit as having tasks ahead of it, and a time limit in which to carry out its particular tasks before it is disbanded. However, the important task of locating the community development mandate within each Ministry is secondary to the major task of keeping community groups and the ministry in constructive contact. While the panel hesitates to add new trees to the already overgrown administrative jungle, we consider that some new and inter-ministerial commission, attended by government but with majority representation by community groups, would clear the way to change at the ministry level.

We envision first an identification and assessment process of going to the communities to find groups and representatives who might contribute to the work of the commission. Options include having conferences in each region to establish just what community development work is being done, and what roles various government ministries or agencies are playing.

This would be followed by a meeting of groups and government to create a work plan for the following years. The final task would be to provide advice on how to maintain the new orientation once the commission has been disbanded.

"... a community organization structure that puts decision-making about services into the hands of the community."

Service provider



Therefore, we recommend that:

- 3. Government staff must be trained and encouraged to take a community approach to their child protection and family support work.**
- 4. Resources must be allocated to groups that conduct community development work.**

- 5. An inter-ministerial commission must be struck to create a work plan leading to a new community development focus within government. It should include government and staff and have majority representation by community groups.**

Community Development Recommendations

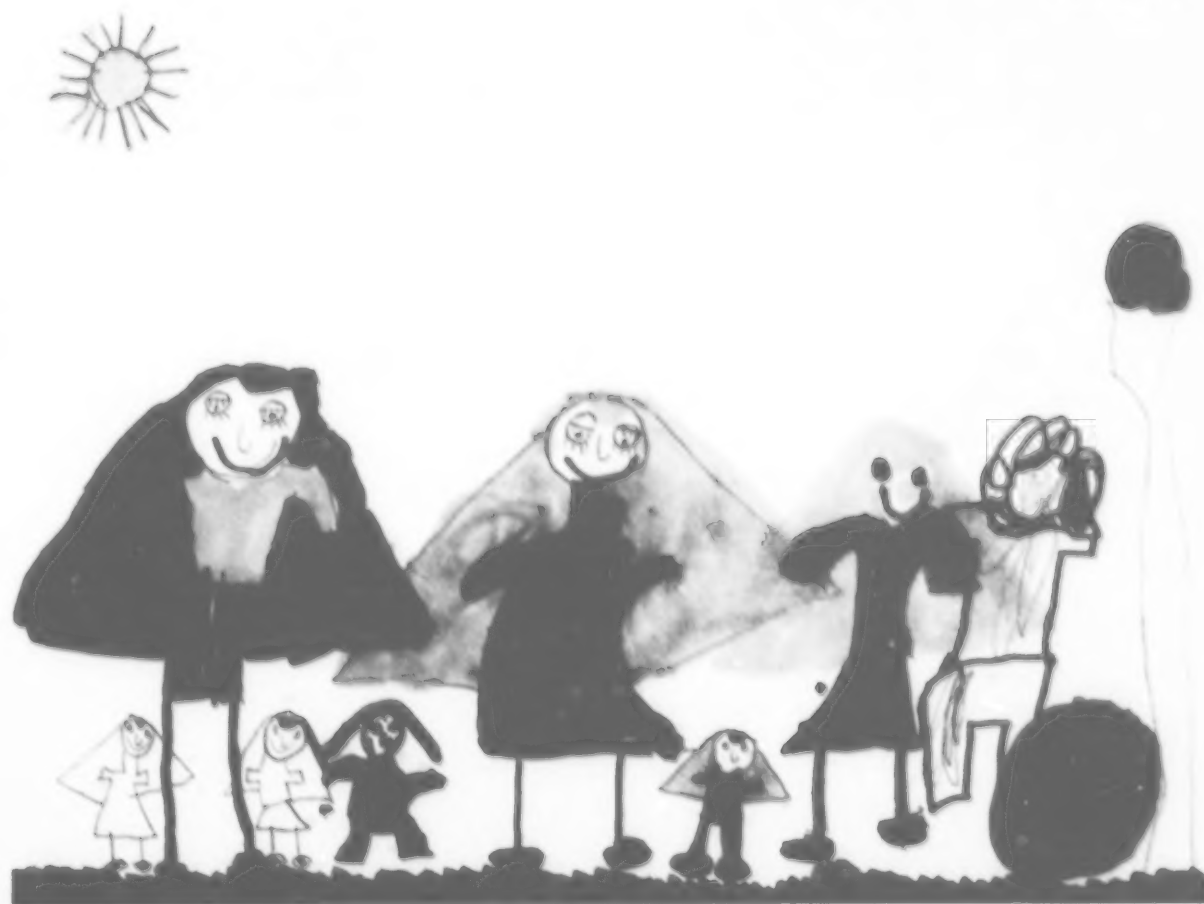
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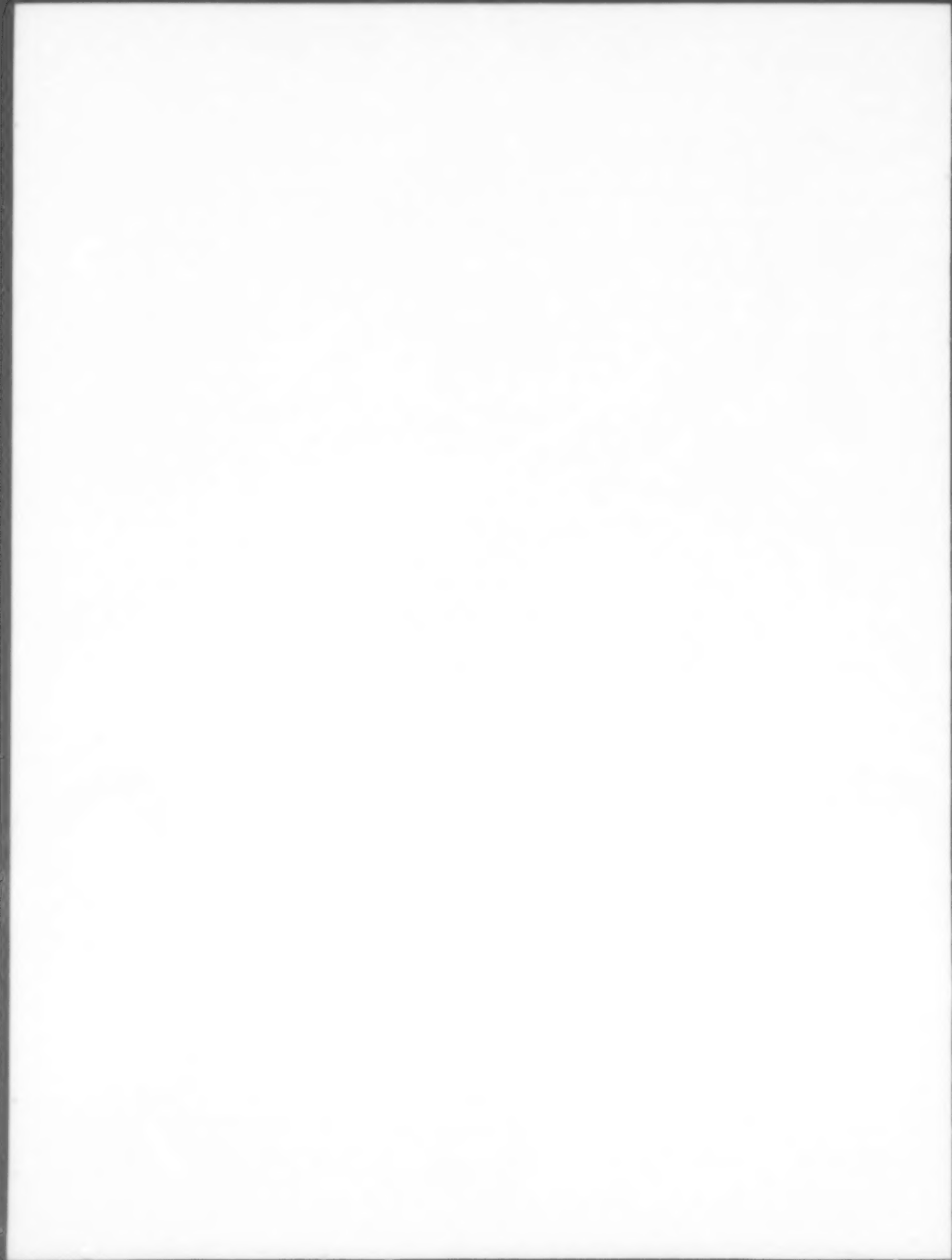
Access To Information

*"Imagine someone
having a secret file
on you."*

YOUTH IN CARE



Carlen Campbell, age 6



Access to Information

Principles

We believe:

- Individuals and families have a right to privacy. Personal information about them that is held by the government should not be divulged to anyone nor any organization without their consent.
- Personal information held by government must be available for review by the person to whom it pertains without unreasonable delay. Individuals should not only be able to see what information is held, but have the means to correct or remove it.
- Any exceptions to the preceding two principles should be clearly articulated in legislation.
- Public information about child protection and family support services must be available to, easily accessible by, and publicized among those who could most benefit from it.

Perspective

One of the features of modern government is its expanding ability to collect information on its citizens. The panel heard many concerns about what personal information the government collects, what it does with that information, and what it should be allowed to do with it. People want to know what the government "has on them", and want to assert their rights over how information is used or divulged. They also want a more open system with easier access to information about services.

We were advised by members of the legal profession that many of these concerns have been addressed by the new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, which comes into effect in October 1993. This represents an important step forward, and most of our recommendations fit with it. However, while the panel has no wish to second-guess how the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* will be applied when implemented, our community consultations convinced us that child protection and family support issues require special attention.

We heard great concern about preserving the privacy of children and families who become involved in the child protection system. Parents worry about the stigma that may be attached to them and to their children if confidential information is divulged, and about their reputation following allegations of abuse. Many wanted information destroyed when their contact with the Ministry was finished. We also heard from children in care who wanted the right to review and correct the information in their files.

There is a fundamental tension between the advantages of an open information system and the desire to protect the confidentiality of children and parents. Information-sharing is viewed by many professionals and service providers as essential to child protection, service coordination and continuity of care. Many parents fear information-gathering, seeing it as an excessive intrusion by the government into their families.

Fears about what might be done with information can prevent people from seeking the services they need. Parents expressed concern that simply seeking counselling might result in the apprehension of their children. At the same time, parents are also frustrated by lack of information. They described to us their difficulties in obtaining information about social services and legal procedures in general, as well as information specific to their own situations. Many felt that confidentiality was used as an excuse to deny them information.

Some presenters told us that language itself can be the barrier to information flow. The specialized languages of the courts and social services put people at a disadvantage when dealing with government and, in effect, excluded them from information they needed. This problem is, of course, magnified for those whose first language is not English.

Issues

1. Public vs. personal information

A clear distinction must be made between two types of information: public and personal. Personal information is about individuals and should remain private, subject to a limited number of strictly applied exceptions. Public information can include everything from ministry annual reports to detailed program descriptions and should be widely available.

The issues we have concentrated on in this chapter are largely concerned with personal information. We stress that this is not to discount the concerns we heard about the quality and availability of public information dealing with child protection and family support.

"Information should be made available to the public in the form of general information and referral services, community information directories, newcomer services, and interagency referrals."

Community planner

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

However, many of these concerns appear to have been addressed in the recent *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. For instance, we strongly support this Act's recognition of the fact that access to information is more than having the authority to receive information. To know what to ask for, a person has to know what information has been collected. When that information arrives it has to be in a form that can be easily consulted and understood.

We agree with the presenters who told us that if government is truly committed to increasing access to public information, it must take a number of measures, including:

- making entry points widely available throughout the province;
- using plain language;
- translating materials into those languages for which there is significant need;
- producing information in culturally appropriate and age-appropriate forms;
- taking advantage of advancing communications technology to produce information in a variety of formats, such as video, brochure and computer database; and
- producing information for people with disabilities, in formats such as braille, or providing access to special telephone services for people with hearing impairment.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. Government must make the strongest possible efforts to ensure that public information on family support and child protection is easily accessible and widely available.

2. Quality of information

We heard a great deal of concern about the quality of personal information collected by government (we use "quality" to include accuracy, completeness and relevance). For example, we were deeply touched by the words of a girl who said her life was made miserable by information that preceded her from foster home to foster home. It incorrectly described her as victim of sexual abuse. She never had a chance to correct or even see the information. Therefore, she always felt that she had been labelled before the new caregivers had even met her. We also heard from parents who feared that unsubstantiated opinions about their families, or information based on anonymous

"The way they give you the information doesn't make sense. I have Grade 6."

Street youth

"Some children do not want information about themselves to be diffused in communities."

*Family support
round table*

phone calls, might be included in written reports and eventually shared between agencies.

Adults and children all expressed the fear that gossip might find its way into their files, surfacing one day to be used against them. All were adamant that they wanted to be able to challenge incorrect information, and correct or complete it as necessary. They also wanted to be able to destroy inaccurate or irrelevant information held by the government.

While the panel believes that increasing people's access to their own files, or to those of people for whom they are responsible will lead to better quality of information, we also believe that guidelines are necessary to control what information goes into files and what is retained. Among other criteria, information must be relevant to the case at hand and there must be rigorous differentiation between facts and opinions in the reports filed by staff. There must also be statutory authority for collecting that information.

The new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* defines personal information as "recorded" information of a specific nature. We are concerned about this definition, particularly with respect to the potential for misuse. Information exists before it is "recorded". It is possible, for instance, for case information about a child to be passed on verbally to an unauthorized person, in violation of that child's right to privacy. As we see it, the definition of information must commence at its point of origin, recorded or not.

However, this brings us to a related point. All relevant information collected and used for decision-making in specific cases must be accurately recorded and safeguarded.

Therefore, we recommend that:

2. Guidelines must be written to ensure that information held by government is relevant, accurate, complete and open to review by the individual to whom it pertains or who is responsible for the person to whom it pertains.
3. People must have the right to correct, complete, challenge or remove information held by government.
4. Information used for making decisions about families and children must be properly recorded.

3. Notification

The panel agrees with many presenters that people must be told when a file or other record has been opened about them or about people for whom they are responsible. We see this both in the context of

human rights and as a safeguard to quality of information. If people do not know that information is being collected on them, they are unable to correct it or challenge irrelevant information.

In our opinion, the new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* does not go far enough in this regard, because it only guarantees notification when information is collected directly from an individual. This allows information to be collected from other sources without notifying the individual that this is being done.

Therefore, we recommend that:

5. Individuals must be notified that a record about them or about people for whom they are responsible has been created.

4. The term "confidentiality"

We were told that seeking access to information pertaining to oneself or one's family can be a frustrating, mystifying and even threatening process. Parents and child advocates in particular called for a more open system in which such information is readily available. It was suggested that when information is requested, the government agency should be required to justify any withholding of information. Currently, it is up to the person seeking information to justify why they are asking for it.

Confidentiality should never be used to prevent people from obtaining information to which they have a right. This is clearly an abuse. Correcting it is partly a question of changing traditional attitudes within government, partly one of improving regulations (in which the new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* should be a help), and partly one of language.

We believe that the word "confidentiality" should be replaced by "privacy" whenever government is dealing with personal information. This would root the protection of personal information in a widely understood human right ("this information is private — it belongs to someone") instead of a murkier administrative concept ("this information is confidential — it belongs to the system"). This change in terms would make it harder for confidentiality to be invoked as an excuse for non-disclosure of information.

Therefore, we recommend that:

6. "Confidentiality" should be replaced by the word "privacy" in policies and procedures regarding family support and child protection, and in general usage by government staff working in these fields.

"Clients, including children, should have a right of access to their file with the onus being on the ministry to show why any specific information should be withheld."

Lawyer



5. Public interest exceptions to privacy

We found widespread agreement that protecting the vulnerable members of our society justifies some exceptions to the right of personal privacy. However, these exceptions must be limited in number and clearly articulated in statute. Law enforcement, protection of informants' anonymity and public safety are some areas in which exceptions are clearly justified. The new *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* addresses this issue in many of its provisions.

In the following pages we discuss a number of sub-issues around public interest exceptions to privacy with particular relevance to family support and child protection.

5.1 Communicable diseases

While it is generally agreed that information about an individual's health ought to be private, we heard widespread concern that control of communicable diseases be included in the exceptions to privacy allowed under the public interest override. Diseases mentioned most frequently included sexually transmitted diseases such as Hepatitis B and HIV.

We were unable to agree on any recommendations in this regard. We believe, however, that the devastating consequences of improper release of this information make it necessary that this exception be governed by strict guidelines, which are currently lacking.

5.2 Information sharing among government agencies and care providers

All of the professionals and many members of the public agreed that sharing of personal information by government agencies is necessary, or at least of great benefit, in child protection work. There was also agreement that such sharing has a great potential for improper use.

The professionals told us that barriers caused by confidentiality rules and practices create duplications and gaps in the provision of services. Service providers repeatedly stressed the need to share information at the community level among social workers, teachers, health care workers, adoptive parents and caregivers. Almost all of them recommended increased inter-ministerial cooperation when this was clearly in the interest of children and families. There was also support for an increased information flow between government agencies and contractors.

As we heard the case for increased information sharing, the panel also heard concerns about how and when information is shared, and also the quality of that information (see Quality of Information issue earlier in this chapter). For example, unsubstantiated opinion or gossip clearly should not pass from agency to agency.

"We never get past the confidentiality issue - we hide behind it."

———— Community member

"You say something in strict confidence to a worker. The worker tells someone else before you're even out the door."

———— Street youth

The tension between the need for privacy and the benefits of information sharing can be seen in the example we heard of a teenage girl who had been hospitalized under the *Mental Health Act*. In order to leave hospital she needed appropriate housing, but there was none available in the region where she lived. The case conference called to resolve her needs had to be attended by staff from both regions, with representation from three ministries: Health, Social Services and Attorney General. All clearly needed information about her case to make appropriate decisions, but just as clearly the teenager's privacy would have to be compromised to do so. (The tension was resolved in this particular case because the teenager consented to the information sharing and attended the case conference.)

Since current information sharing practices vary widely within the province, we believe that standardized guidelines are necessary. These guidelines should specify that personal information may be shared among ministries or agencies only when the following criteria are satisfied:

- consent has been given by the individual concerned, or their custodian;
- the information is clearly relevant to the case at hand; and
- the information is clearly for the benefit of the individual involved, and/or for the safety of service providers and/or caregivers.

The guidelines should be consistent with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, and standard throughout all ministries with responsibilities in the areas of family support and child protection. Appeal mechanisms should be available by referring concerns to the Privacy Commissioner.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 7. Standardized guidelines must be created for the sharing of personal information among ministries and agencies.**
- 8. Information sharing must be done only with the consent of the individual to whom the information pertains or of the person responsible for that individual.**

5.3 Employment screening

While protection from abuse is difficult to ensure throughout society as a whole, efforts can and should be made to exclude abusers from all positions of authority over children and other vulnerable people, and from positions that involve working around them. The

various mechanisms currently in use in the province are neither universal nor standardized, and are not necessarily part of the terms and conditions of employment.

The panel agrees with the many members of the public who told us that there must be mechanisms in place to ensure appropriate screening of those positions. These must apply to positions both in government and in services regulated or contracted by government.

Employment screening mechanisms must include criminal record checks, reference checks and employment checks. In addition, recruitment procedures must make clear to prospective employees that it is up to them to disclose past records of abuse and that failure to do so may be grounds for disciplinary action. This also applies during the course of employment, when employees must also disclose charges or convictions of abuse. Some collective agreements contain provisions relevant to this issue, and government should consult with bargaining agents as planning proceeds on employment screening.

As well as being effective, the employment screening process must be fair, must include the notification and consent of the prospective employee to such checks, and should contain the right of appeal. Information divulged in checks must be relevant to the position under consideration.

We heard that employers may be reluctant to react candidly to reference checks for fear of the possibility of charges of defamation. For example, if a supervisor strongly suspected that a former employee had abused a child in care but had no proof, the supervisor might be afraid to share this suspicion if a prospective employer calls for a reference check. We believe that the sharing of such suspicions is proper when it is a question of protecting children, and that it is defensible against charges of defamation using the criteria of "qualified privilege". This means that there is a moral duty to give the opinion, that the person asking for it has a legitimate interest in hearing it, and that the opinion is given in good faith.

"As a mother and grandmother I urge you to promote legislation that would prohibit convicted sex offenders from working in positions of authority and trust."

———— Community member

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 9. Legislation must be enacted to provide for a single, standard process for employment screening, applicable to all government funded or regulated agencies dealing with vulnerable people. The employment screening process must:**
 - **comply with the principles of administrative fairness, including right of appeal and relevance of information;**

- be administered through a central agency, such as the Freedom of Information Privacy Commissioner; and
- address ongoing employment (where it is up to the employee to disclose charges or convictions of abuse and where failure to do so may be grounds for discipline).

5.4 Child abuser registry

Many presenters called for public registries containing information about child abusers, particularly sex offenders. Some suggested that the whereabouts of "known abusers" be monitored, and that their names be kept in a national registry accessible by the public. There was little consensus on exactly what should be kept in this registry. Suggestions ranged from the names of convicted abusers to the names of victims of abuse.

We believe registries will not prevent child abuse, and reject any plans to establish such a registry in British Columbia. We doubt whether one can be implemented in such a way as to satisfy the following questions:

- can it be effective and serve the purpose for which it is intended (to protect children from abusers)?
- is there legal authority for it?
- can it ensure that the information is identified and gathered fairly?
- can it ensure the security of the information that is being gathered and retained?

A certain category of information about abusers is inaccessible and will probably remain so. These are cases where abuse is suspected (there has been an incident reported) but this information is not in the public domain because it has not led to a charge or conviction. Other cases may be grounded in either fact or hearsay. At issue is how or whether this information could be included in a registry, given both the rights of the alleged abuser and the possibility that a defamation suit may be initiated against the person disclosing this type of information.

The panel agrees that children (and, we stress, other vulnerable members of society) must be protected from known abusers. However, the briefings we received about several existing or proposed systems leave us at best unconvinced and at worst profoundly disturbed about the potential for their misuse.

We were told that "hidden" or informal information systems exist in government, and may be proliferating as information technology advances. We believe that guidelines must be available to address these hidden systems, and appropriate sanctions brought to bear if the guidelines are not followed.

The panel considers that, in contrast to a registry, employment screening for people in authority over or proximity to children is a more effective mechanism for child protection.

"Birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees all need accurate information."

Adoptive parent

5.5 Information rights of adoptive families

The panel received many submissions on access to information in matters regarding adoption. In our chapter, *Guardianship*, we have proposed a re-definition of adoption based on the principle that the bond between children and their families cannot be extinguished. This re-definition would provide open access to adoption records consistent with the principles of this chapter.

This change will also require a transition phase to deal with information and privacy issues arising from adoption placements made under existing or previous legislation.

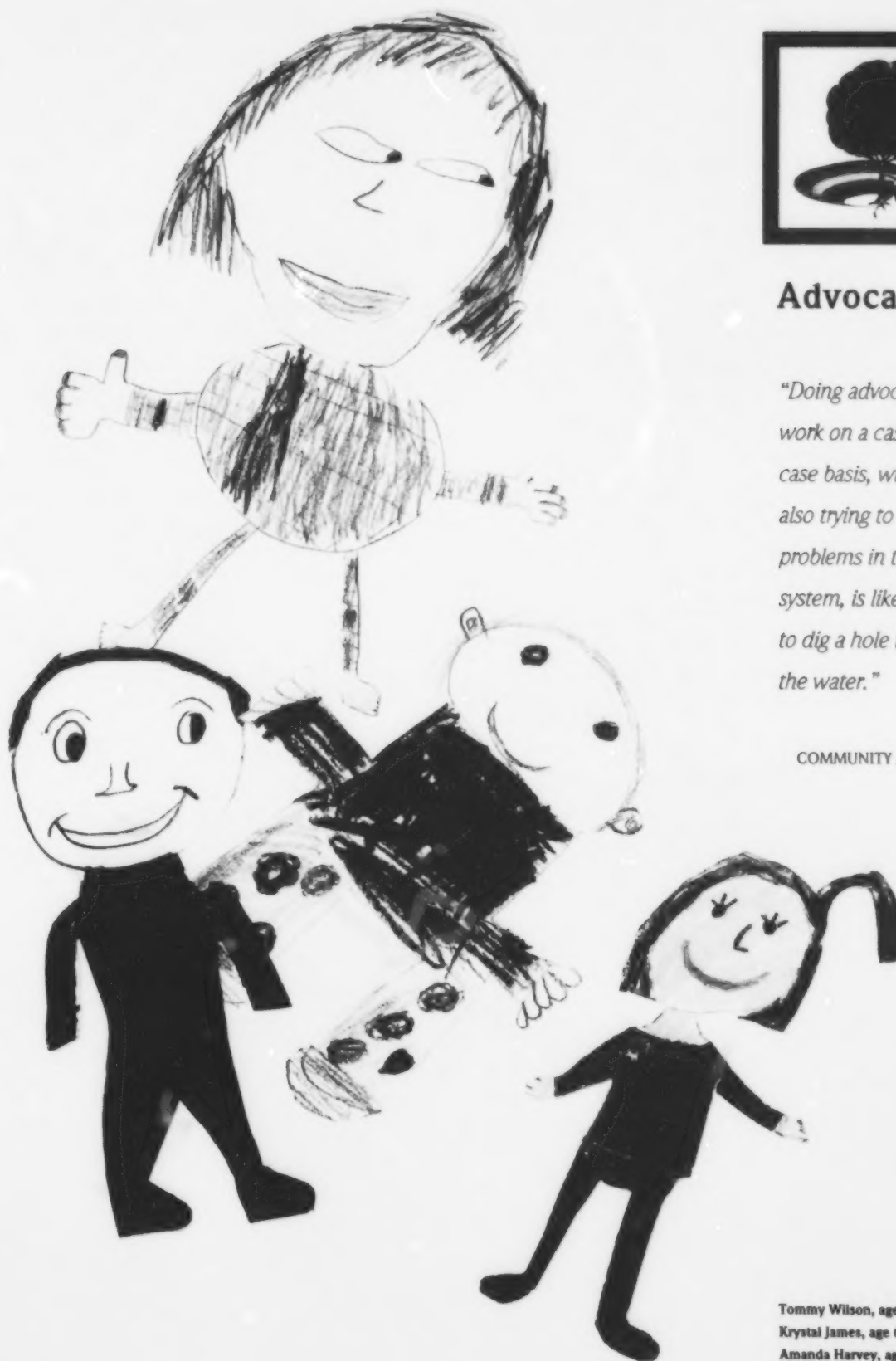
Therefore, we recommend that:

- 10. Government must adapt its information practices regarding adoptions to the principles on access to information contained in this report.**

Access to Information Recommendations

1. Government must make the strongest possible efforts to ensure that public information on family support and child protection is easily accessible and widely available.
2. Guidelines must be written to ensure that information held by government is relevant, accurate, complete and open to review by the individual to whom it pertains or who is responsible for the person to whom it pertains.
3. People must have the right to correct, complete, challenge or remove information held by government.
4. Information used for making decisions about families and children must be properly recorded.
5. Individuals must be notified that a record about them or about people for whom they are responsible has been created.
6. "Confidentiality" should be replaced by the word "privacy" in policies and procedures regarding family support and child protection, and in general usage by government staff working in these fields.
7. Standardized guidelines must be created for the sharing of personal information among ministries and agencies.
8. Information sharing must be done only with the consent of the individual to whom the information pertains or the person responsible for that individual.
9. Legislation must be enacted to provide for a single, standard process for employment screening, applicable to all government funded or regulated agencies dealing with vulnerable people. The employment screening process must:
 - comply with the principles of administrative fairness, including right of appeal and relevance of information;
 - be administered through a central agency, such as the Freedom of Information Privacy Commissioner; and
 - address ongoing employment (where it is up to the employee to disclose charges or convictions of abuse and where failure to do so may be grounds for discipline).

- 10.** Government must adapt its information practices regarding adoptions to the principles on access to information contained in this report.



Advocacy

"Doing advocacy work on a case-by-case basis, without also trying to correct problems in the system, is like trying to dig a hole in the water."

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

Tommy Wilson, age 7
Krystal James, age 6
Amanda Harvey, age 7
Jonnelle Stubbington, age 7



Advocacy

Principles

We believe:

- Families and young people are entitled to be heard, to be listened to with respect, and to receive a response to their concerns.
- To ensure that they are heard and responded to, **families** and young people are entitled to advocacy services, ranging from information and advice to formal representation before administrative tribunals and the courts.
- The child's natural advocate is the parent, and **parents** should be supported in this role whenever possible.
- Young people are entitled to advocate for themselves. Their scope for doing so should increase according to their ability and stage of development.
- Government staff and caregivers have a role to **play** as advocates within the system for the people they serve.
- Given the social and cultural diversity of the province, government must have the flexibility to accommodate a wide range of advocacy roles and styles.
- Advocacy is necessary and legitimate on both the individual (case-by-case) level and on the systemic level.
- The right to appeal decisions that affect an individual's life must be built into all administrative systems.

Perspective

One of the strongest messages we heard as we travelled the province was that "the system doesn't listen." People don't know who to talk to when their needs are not being met, and feel that their opinion would not be respected anyway.

From young people who are or have been in care, we heard the complaint that they are tired of other people presuming to speak for

them when they have to deal with government. Most would far rather have someone assist them to say their own piece and see that they were heard. This applies even more strongly when they are faced with an investigation or apprehension; they simply want someone knowledgeable to be **with** them as they go through the administrative hoops. And they want that someone to be **one** person, not a series of officials who pass them on like helpless batons in some involuntary relay race.

Parents told us that in most cases they feel they are the best people to speak for themselves and for their children, but that there are too many barriers to doing so. One of these barriers is the very complexity of the system. They said they come out of meetings with government staff more bewildered than when they went in. If they need an advocate, they need someone who can help them navigate the system.

Other family members — siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles — complained that the system makes no room for them as advocates for their relatives. This is wrong, they insisted, especially when people who do **not** know the children in question (but happen to have a professional title) are accepted as advocates.

Social workers told us that in many cases they want to act as advocates for children or families, but that doing so is actively discouraged by the system. Taking on an advocacy role means bending the rules, and is difficult because there are no clear procedures for this. In **any** case, it is risky to one's career. Most said that some form of independent advocacy was also necessary.

Caregivers too said that they felt they could play a role as advocates for children in their care, and that this would be a natural extension of their role. Unfortunately, the system is not set up to hear them. Foster parents in particular felt that they were not listened to sufficiently when decisions were made regarding children in their care, and that there was no encouragement for them to help the children be heard.

Finally, we heard from a number of community organizations about the need for advocacy on broad issues as well as in individual cases. Government tends to see them as the "enemy", they said, and there is little funding or recognition for the work they do on behalf of children, families and groups of people with common needs.

Issues

No system is or can be entirely fair. This reality, and the fact that the government is more powerful than any individual, is what makes advocacy necessary. By making sure their concerns are heard, advocacy provides people with ways to redress (or at least begin to redress) the imbalance of power between them and the government.

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

We adopted this working definition for advocacy:

Advocacy is the act of speaking in support of human concerns or needs. Where people have their own voice, advocacy means making sure they are heard; where they have difficulty in speaking, it means providing help; where they have no voice, it means speaking for them.

Humane government recognizes that the hand that feeds must expect to be bitten (or at least growled at) occasionally. In other words, advocacy is necessary and legitimate. Government must be consistent in its treatment of citizens, yet flexible enough to allow for human diversity. Advocacy helps government maintain this delicate, ongoing balancing act.

Unfortunately, advocacy has become a loaded word. In many minds, it is synonymous with adversarial confrontation. We feel that the word must be reclaimed from this narrow, negative pigeon-holing and restored to its wider and more constructive sense of speaking in support of something. Far from being narrow, there is a **range** of methods and styles of advocacy. This includes collaborative or cooperative approaches, as well as confrontation.

Reclaiming this concept of advocacy, and applying it to child protection and family support, will require a new attitude and flexibility from government. Governments must accept that individuals or communities should have the option of choosing the method or style of advocacy that best suits their needs. Government will also have to accept the need to support and foster advocacy both within and outside itself.

In most cases, individuals are their own best advocates; they know better than anyone what they feel and want. Advocacy programs should aim first at helping individuals present their own cases.

At the moment, children are not required to be heard when decisions are made concerning their welfare. The panel considers that any legislation regarding child protection and family support should contain language specifying that, before any decision is made, the decision-maker must consult with the child and the family. Children and families both must have access to advocacy services during that process of consultation.

Many presenters told us that there should be a range of advocacy services available. At one end is the parent, the child's natural advocate. Parents should therefore be supported in this role wherever possible. Sometimes another family member may fulfill this role, including a member of the extended family. Clearly, however, children sometimes need an advocate who is not a relative. In some cases the advocate can

"For the past 10 years the word advocacy has been unpopular with government. We must bring advocacy out of the closet . . ."

Advocacy organization

be a respected community member such as a teacher or religious leader. In other cases, the advocate must have formal expertise in child protection and advocacy.

Currently, there are many possible sources of child and family advocacy in British Columbia, including:

- associations created around common needs, such as the B.C. Coalition for People with Disabilities;
- the Ombudsman (issues of administrative fairness throughout government);
- the Superintendent of Family and Child Service;
- Legal Aid and lawyers (mostly individual advocacy, including the child's interests);
- the City of Vancouver Children's Advocate;
- the Child Advocate (a government-appointed lawyer representing the interests of children in court cases);
- the Family Court Counsellor program of the Ministry of Attorney General (disputed custody cases);
- non-governmental organizations such as the Society for Children and Youth;
- professional and labour organizations; and
- the offices of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

While we support this diversity, we know that it can seem bewildering to people looking for help. It must also be recognized that such services are not equally available across the province, and are especially hard to access in northern and rural communities. For example, the provincial government currently employs only one full-time Child Advocate.

There is currently some confusion over the role of the Superintendent of Family and Child Service. The Superintendent has no statutory powers in the area of advocacy, but has taken on the role of child and family advocate in some cases. We have addressed the subject of the Superintendent at greater length in the chapter, *Guardianship: Past and Future*, and propose to remove advocacy from that position's list of duties.

No single form of advocacy resolves all of the concerns we heard in our meetings with the public. In many cases, the needs of children or families for advocacy can be met informally by a "natural" advocate such as a parent, relative, caregiver, respected

member of the community or a trusted friend. Government services must be open to this possibility and, if necessary, find space or resources to accommodate advocates.

In other situations, the advocate must be independent of any ministerial line function, or indeed of government itself.

Many of those who spoke to us, particularly children, did not want any special advocacy mechanisms. They found social services complex enough without having to resort to another office or department. Instead, they simply want to feel that their social worker (or other caregiver) is "on their side", will provide any information they need to know, and listen seriously and respectfully to their concerns.

We take this to mean that advocacy for individuals is needed first and foremost **within** the social services, from the moment a child or family first comes into contact with them.

This raises an important point: a distinction must be made between individual and systemic advocacy. Systemic advocacy is undertaken on behalf of groups of people, much as a "class action" suit can be taken on in law. The focus of systemic advocacy is legislation, regulations, policies or procedures that affect groups of people. It is often directed towards creating social change. Activities include public awareness-building, representation of group concerns, and monitoring and evaluation of the social services.

Individual advocacy is undertaken in specific cases on behalf of a individual person. It frequently focuses on problems of access to services and may also deal with concerns about the quality of service received. Individual advocates may provide: financial, legal or moral support to help children and families advocate for themselves; information and advice; representation of individuals appearing before decision-makers; and dispute resolution, up to and including mediation and adjudication (see the chapter, *Dispute Resolution*).

Traditionally, government is even more uncomfortable with systemic than with individual advocacy, but both are necessary.

1. Family and Child Advocacy Office

We believe that an independent Family and Child Advocacy Office should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. The purpose of the Advocacy Office would be to monitor and audit family and child services provided by provincial ministries. It would also undertake individual advocacy on a regional basis for families and children receiving government services. The Advocacy Office would absorb family and child functions currently provided by the Office of the Ombudsman.



"Youth often don't trust the system. Effective advocates have to be independent, outside people, especially in juvenile corrections . . ."

— Youth in care

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office, responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature, should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases through a network of regional offices.

2. Child advocacy

Child advocacy was an issue that came up repeatedly in the panel's consultations with the public. We found that there was little agreement on what this term might mean in a practical way.

The traditional orientation of child welfare has been to act in what are assumed to be the young person's "best interests" without necessarily consulting the person first. This sometimes results in decisions completely contrary to the young person's wishes.

We believe that this orientation must be turned around. Young people's wishes must always be listened to with respect by those acting on their behalf, and given weight when decisions are made. This does not ignore the fact that professional judgement is often required to determine the best interests of the younger or more vulnerable members of our society. It does, however, mean that the individual's preference must not be ignored. In some cases, the presence of an independent advocate may be necessary to see that this is done.

We believe that whenever tax dollars are spent on child welfare, child advocacy must be present. However, distinct advocacy mechanisms may be necessary to serve children already in care and those outside the child welfare system.

All young people who enter care or come under the responsibility of the government must be told of their right to have an independent advocate. They must also be provided with the name of a person who can advocate for them, and told how to contact that person.

Therefore, we recommend that:

2. The government must respect the wishes of young people and act on those wishes when they are not in clear conflict with their best interests.
3. All young people who enter alternative care or receive government services have a right to an independent advocate, and must be provided with that advocate's name and the means to contact that advocate.

"Youth are a weak political force and rarely have anyone to advocate for them."

Community association

3. Family advocacy

As with child advocacy, this was a topic on which there was considerable public interest but little agreement. Some presenters argued for formal advocacy programs to protect the rights of parents, and those of grandparents.

Family advocacy can be especially complex, as there may be numerous people and interests involved. Families may also be at a disadvantage in being heard because of the orientation of child protection services, which put the child's interests and safety first. Nonetheless, families are as much entitled to advocacy services as the individual children in child protection cases. The Child and Family Advocacy Office described previously would also have a role in this.

As we heard from representatives of various cultural communities, extended families also have the right to a voice in many cases. Currently, whether this occurs depends on the sensitivity of individual social workers or the extended families' ability to employ legal help. This is not sufficient.

Therefore, we recommend that:

4. Legislation must specify that before any decision is made regarding child protection and family support, families must be consulted as to their wishes. Families must have access to advocacy services during this process of consultation.

4. Community advocacy

The panel heard that communities too must be allowed to play an advocacy role when such a role is natural to their culture or circumstances. For instance, elders or religious leaders may represent a community in advocating on behalf of a family or child. Government must have the flexibility to accommodate such needs at all levels. In addition, whenever advocacy services are offered by government, they must be culturally competent.

Therefore, we recommend that:

5. Government must have the flexibility to accommodate the distinct advocacy needs or practices of specific communities.

5. Encouraging advocacy within the government

As mentioned earlier, we found that most families and children with a problem or concern want their "worker" to be on their side,

"We need parents' advisors or family advocates for parents."

Lawyer

"... that advocacy and support groups be available for women in custody disputes."

Parent

**"This is my life; consider me
a person, talk to me."**

Youth

provide any information they need to know, and listen seriously and respectfully to their preferences. In other words, they feel that the "worker", who is the system's representative, should also be their advocate within the system.

We understand that some front-line workers already assume this role, and often do it extremely well. However, several changes are necessary if this practice is to become more widespread and effective.

The first change is administrative: advocacy work is **work**, and time and other resources must be freed up for internal advocacy to be done effectively. We heard from one social worker who said that much of his advocacy work has to be done outside of normal working hours. Advocacy must be part of the job, not an add-on to be done if time permits.

The second change is procedural: it must be possible to review decisions with which the child or family does not agree or which the line employee believes are not in the client's best interests. Review mechanisms must be established to permit staff to carry such concerns up through the hierarchy until they are resolved.

The third, and perhaps most important change, is attitudinal. Management within the various social services must accept and value the staff member who takes up a person's case. There should be no fear of retribution if a staff member makes an appeal on behalf of a client.

Similarly, caregivers must be able to advocate for the young people in their care without fear, and must be respected for doing so. Again, internal review mechanisms must be available. These review mechanisms should also be accessible to parents and families if they prefer to do their own advocacy.

We believe that a task force should be established to formulate appeal and review processes for staff and caregivers.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 6. Government must recognize the advocacy role of staff and caregivers, and develop a working environment in which they can act in the best interests of their clients.**
- 7. The Ministry of Social Services must develop appeal processes that allow staff and caregivers to take on an advocacy role without fear of retribution from their superiors.**
- 8. The Ministry of Social Services should establish a task force to formulate appeal and review processes for staff and caregivers.**

6. External advocacy

An advocate must represent the preferences or best interests of the individual, rather than the interests of an agency or organization. In some cases the ability of a social worker or other government employee to advocate for a client will be compromised by the simple fact that they are government employees. The social services must accept the necessity and legitimacy of advocates who are independent of line responsibilities, and in some cases entirely independent of the government.

The creation of an independent Child and Family Advocacy Office, as described earlier, will be an important addition to the range of external advocates available to British Columbians. However, we believe there is also a role for non-governmental advocates.

Non-governmental advocacy groups contribute to the accountability of government. This is particularly true when they have the expertise and resources to monitor and evaluate whether services promised by politicians or required by law are **indeed** provided. This is not to ignore the essential role of agencies such as the Auditor General or the Ombudsman in guaranteeing accountability. Concerns about government actions or regulations are usually **voiced** first by the community affected, then dealt with by the **agencies**.

The Legal Services Society and some **independent** groups currently receive funding from government, **and we believe this funding** should be expanded.

Since systemic advocacy tends to have **political** implications, it is done best by groups outside the government structure. For this reason, the panel urges that mechanisms should be **considered** that encourage or support external advocacy groups without compromising their independence.

Therefore, we recommend that:

9. All ministries with responsibilities for families and children must accept the legitimacy of external advocacy.
10. Funding must be available to support independent advocacy groups without compromising their independence.

7. Changing attitudes

Both inside and outside the social services, it will be necessary to change attitudes regarding people's right to advocacy. The government must learn to listen, hear and respond.

Within the government, resources will be necessary for training and workshops aimed at all levels of government. External advocacy

"Advocacy . . . it is about giving the best to all people involved . . ."

———— Community member

"When individuals are constantly treated as second class citizens, it is very difficult for them to have self-esteem and to advocate on their own behalf."

———— Family member

groups should be consulted in the design of this training, and should deliver some of it.

In addition, public education is required to help people of all ages understand that it is their right to be heard if they have a complaint or concern. Government must make it widely known that it is becoming more flexible, and must provide information about how to use appeal processes.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 11. Resources must be invested in order to change government attitudes towards internal and external advocacy.**
- 12. Public education programs must be undertaken to make people more aware of their right to be heard and to be provided with advocacy services.**

Advocacy Recommendations

1. An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office, responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature, should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases through a network of regional offices.
2. The government must respect the wishes of young people and act on those wishes when they are not in clear conflict with their best interests.
3. All young people who enter alternative care or receive government services have a right to an independent advocate if they wish, and must be provided with that advocate's name and the means to contact that advocate.
4. Legislation must specify that before any decision is made regarding child protection and family support, families must be consulted as to their wishes. Families must have access to advocacy services during this process of consultation.
5. Government must have the flexibility to accommodate the distinct advocacy needs or practices of specific communities.
6. Government must recognize the advocacy role of staff and caregivers, and develop a working environment in which they can act in the best interests of their clients.
7. The Ministry of Social Services must develop appeal processes that allow staff and caregivers to take on an advocacy role without fear of retribution from their superiors.
8. The Ministry of Social Services should establish a task force to formulate appeal and review processes for staff and caregivers.
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10. Funding must be available to support independent advocacy groups without compromising their independence.
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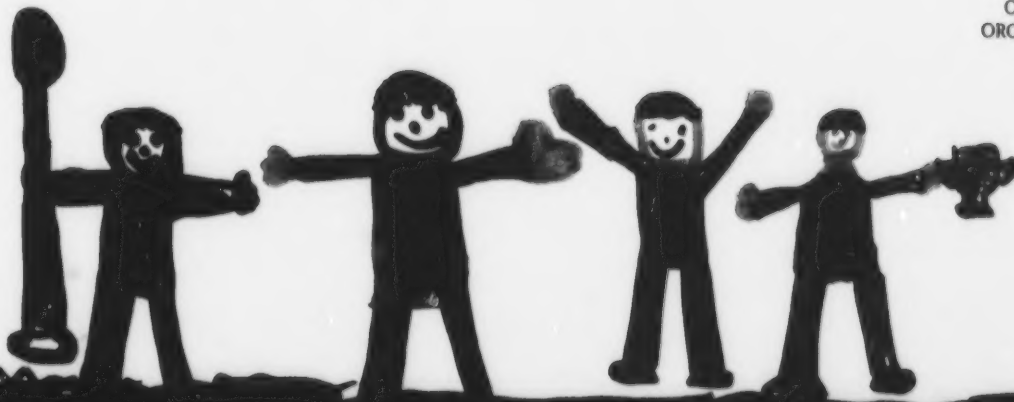
- 12.** Public education programs must be undertaken to make people more aware of their right to be heard and to be provided with advocacy services.



Support Services

*"It is time to write
legislation which
will truly protect our
children by giving
them the skills and
supports necessary
to live lives."*

COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION





Support Services

Principles

We believe:

- All families have strengths. From time to time, families may require information and/or support to enhance these strengths.
- Families have the capacity to change and learn.
- Family-centred support services can alleviate many family issues before they become crises.
- Support services must recognize that families are influenced by their circumstances and that the community can play a substantial role in family life.
- Government must give high priority to responding to family needs in the financing, development, delivery and integration of all programs in all ministries that serve families and children.
- Communities have a right and responsibility to be part of support service planning.
- Support services for families and children must be accessible, timely, affordable, appropriate and culturally competent.

Perspective

Families and children, social workers and caregivers were almost unanimous in requesting more support services. Many families perceive that the current focus of service provision is problem-centred; as a result, many families are afraid to contact the Ministry. Specifically, they fear that they may be subjected to a child protection investigation (which is not a support service) and that the child may be removed from their custody. They are afraid of being trapped in the child welfare system. This distrust is aggravated by the confusing language and unfamiliar procedures used by the Ministry and the stigma of being labelled as a "problem" family.

The crisis orientation of family support services is another problem commonly identified. Many parents complained that they sought

"We support the shift of services that prevent rather than just intervene in situations that place our community's families at risk."

————— *Public health nurse*

support but heard the message that their problem was not serious enough yet, meaning that they had to wait until a family emergency until they could get help. They felt that this practice stresses intervention and removal of children as methods of solving problems after they have occurred. Many family members suggested that the lack of support services forced them into crisis.

Families and youth told us that many of the services they required were unavailable or difficult to obtain. As a result, they often felt that they were left without services or that they had to adapt themselves and their needs to fit the system. They suggested that services should be provided to the family as a whole to meet their needs.

Social workers and caregivers were frustrated with the lack of support services. They would like to deliver support services directly, but cannot do so because of their heavy workload demands. They complained that they could often foresee crises before they occurred, but lacked both the time and resources to do anything about them.

Many community members pointed out that each community has a unique character with specific needs. They expressed a desire to play an important role in choosing and ranking services for their communities, but cautioned that they should not be expected to take on the responsibility of providing services. They also indicated dissatisfaction with the inequality of service availability among communities.

Based on what we have heard, we conclude that the emphasis of the entire family and child services system must be shifted towards support services and away from intervention programs. We take the need to protect children very seriously; however, we believe that the current emphasis on intervention during a crisis is a "band-aid treatment" for most family issues. Intervention can be damaging to families because of the emphasis on blame and because of the disruption to family life.

The lack of available support services forces social workers to rely on intervention and prevents them from drawing on more effective options to support the family. By providing a wide range of support services, in addition to the statutory ones provided by family service ministries, the integrity of many families can be sustained and the need for intervention can often be avoided.

A family-centred system recognizes and enhances the strengths of each family member while minimizing the tendency to find fault and lay blame. In this approach, parents are supported in fulfilling their child-rearing roles and children are protected within the family setting. Communities have a vital role in supporting families by developing support services plans that will address local concerns.

"We should be supporting families as our first priority, but unless we have the tools to do the job we can't succeed."

————— *Social worker*

"Empower (families) them to make changes that may assist in keeping their families together rather than splitting them up."

————— *Foster parents*

This shift in emphasis is vital, and is a theme throughout our entire report. This topic is discussed further in the chapters *Community Development* and *Service Delivery Structure*.

Issues

1. Range of support services

Support services are those that assist families to enhance their abilities. Families require support services because of the many stresses they face in our society, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, high transportation costs, difficulty in finding child care and shifts in family structure. These stresses are especially difficult for families who are isolated, who lack contact with extended families, or who do not have a natural support structure.

We consider that the range of support services is a comprehensive set of diverse programs that vary from community to community. No list would do justice to the wide range of support service needs in each community. In our view, support services for families and children include adequate day care, social housing, support for children in schools and marital and family counselling. There are some things basic to communities (such as parks, houses, schools and roads) that are not support services.

Support services are offered in many ways: through natural supports, such as friends and relatives who can offer assistance and advice; through community supports that enhance the quality of life, such as parks programs, youth clubs and recreation programs; through general community and government support programs, such as prenatal classes or family counselling; and through issue-specific services, such as sexual assault counselling. Support services may be offered in communities by individuals, volunteer organizations, various levels of government or government-funded agencies.

Support services must be available on a voluntary basis for all families at all stages of family life. We believe that support services must be made as attractive and non-stigmatizing as possible to reduce the fear currently associated with seeking these services. We are even cautious to stay away from the word "prevention" because for some it implies later intervention. Although child protection investigations may be necessary in some situations, we do not consider investigations or the removal of a child as part of support services.

2. Access

Currently, most ministry-provided support services can only be accessed through a social worker who determines whether a family is "at risk". Families complain that this method of access leads to

"We believe that a social services system that provides a wide range of prevention, transition and protective services presents the best opportunity to match families to appropriate services."

Service provider

stigmatization and fault-finding, and that it forces families to wait until a crisis before receiving assistance. We believe that families should have direct and voluntary access to services without becoming part of a social worker's caseload. The method an individual family uses to gain access to a service, whether voluntary or prescribed, must have no bearing whatsoever on the quality and timing of service delivery. The methods of gaining access may include direct application to a service provider, or referral by a social worker, another professional or a community information and referral service.

Parents and youth told us that they cannot figure out what support services are available in their own communities because accurate public information about services is nonexistent in many places. They do not know where to begin to get the information they need. We believe that families and youth generally know when they need support services. To get to these services, they need an easily understood means of getting information about services. They also need appropriate referrals.

Some communities have coordinating bodies that compile community resource directories and provide information. These types of information services, however, have not received much attention from governments. The importance of these services is often not recognized, and they tend to be inadequately funded.

3. Role of the community

The interdependence between families and their communities makes it appropriate for communities to play a vital role in identifying, planning and ranking the services that will enhance and develop family strengths. Not only do communities need ways to conduct this planning, they also need a formal mechanism to present these plans to government so that communities have access to resources. This section repeats most of the content of section 2, *The Role of the Community*, from the chapter *Community Development*.

The process of community development allows each community to plan for its own needs. Community planning is done in a variety of ways. It is the work of activists and organizers, politicians and planners. It has become a modern feature of municipal government to have some form of city plan. While city plans have been around for a long time, they have only recently included social considerations in addition to physical concerns.

We believe that family and child support services are most appropriately developed at the community level and that these plans will be as unique as the communities they represent. A community family and child service plan must recognize existing services, rank the new services required, and include monitoring, review and evaluation

"Preventative services need to be community-based with open referral, preferably with one entry point where information about services can be obtained."

_____ *Service provider*

"The Ministry should make a concerted effort to involve the community in developing services to families."

_____ *Ministry management*

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

functions. Any plan is only a "snapshot" of the needs of that moment, so it must have the capacity for review and revision.

Finally, the community must have a formal way of communicating its plan to the provincial government. The provincial government must assist with resources to ensure that community planning occurs. It also has an obligation to fund community-based support services.

We recognize that communities have increasing expectations of the support services they want, and that these expectations are often not met because of government restraint policies and limited funding. We believe, however, that dramatic changes need to be made in the government's funding policies. Instead of spending the majority of its family and child services funding on highly interventionist, statutory programs, the government should provide more funding for community-based support services. Additionally, the government must recognize that many communities are not provided with their fair share of support services and it must make efforts to provide service equity among communities.



Support Services Recommendations

1. The provincial government must provide the funding and personnel to develop a continuum of support services in communities according to community-identified plans.
2. Communities must recognize their obligation to develop community plans concerning family and child support services that represent the unique needs of the community. These plans will allow communities to review, monitor, evaluate, rank and recommend support services and to conduct an ongoing evaluation of services.
3. A mechanism must be established to allow communities to fulfill their obligation to develop family and child support service plans.
4. The provincial government must provide clear mechanisms for communities to present their community needs assessment for funding consideration.
5. The provincial government must accept financial responsibility for providing comprehensive community information concerning family and child support services.
6. All communities must develop plans to ensure that the public has ways of getting information on family and child support services.
7. Provincial government funding must focus on family and child support services.
8. Mechanisms must be established to ensure service equity between communities.



Youth Services

*"We don't need
another family - we
need another
future."*

YOUTH



Cherry Hooper, age 10
Laura Woods, age 8
Ian Charleston, age 10



Youth Services

Principles

We believe:

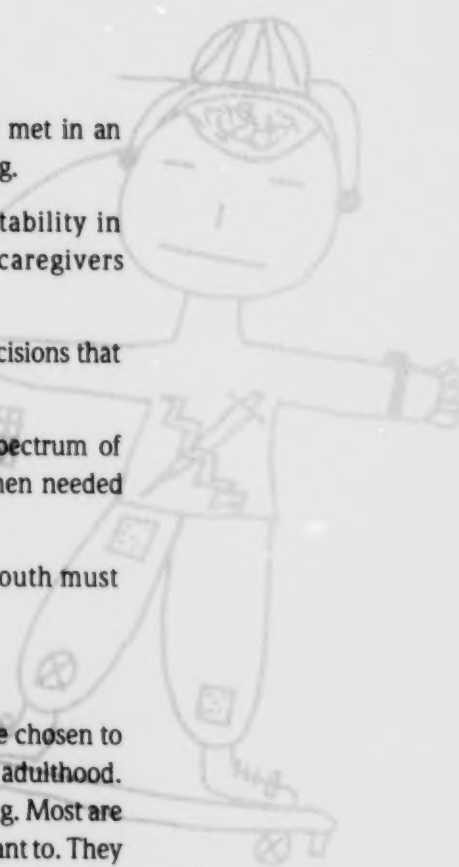
- Youth have a right to have their basic needs met in an environment that is safe, healthy and nurturing.
- Youth have the right to continuity and stability in their relationships with their families, caregivers and communities.
- Youth must be included and involved in **all** decisions that have an effect on their lives.
- Youth and families are entitled to a **broad spectrum** of services. These services must be delivered when needed and in the manner in which they are needed.
- The heritage, religious and cultural ties of youth must be respected.

Perspective

We have not defined youth as an age; rather, we have chosen to define youth as the transitional time between childhood and adulthood. Youth are not children, yet they still need care and nurturing. Most are not quite ready to live independently although they often want to. They still need support and people who care about them.

In our travels around the province we made a special effort to meet with youth. We had meetings with children in care in almost every community. We met with street youth, youth in correctional facilities, youth who were or had been in the care of the Ministry of Social Services, and with young people who were parents. The vast majority of young people we met with had some experience with the "system" in their lives. We were saddened and angered after some meetings when the realization struck us that the "system" had become irrelevant and often destructive to the lives of these young people. We also felt hopeful and optimistic because these young people have incredible strength and resilience. This chapter is our attempt to speak on behalf of the voices we heard.

The young people we met were clear about their needs. They need money, housing, educational opportunities, counselling and adults who are respectful and caring in their lives. They were angry that the





"system" does not allow them a voice in decisions made about them. They often said that the "system" tried to make them fit the service rather than altering the service to meet their needs. Many young people were living apart from their families. Several of them said they wished there had been more help for themselves and their families early on. They recognized that their parents need help too. Often they told us that by the time their parents sought help it was too late. Also, too few services were provided. They told us that having a safe place to "chill out" for a few days during family crises would have made a difference.

Parents also were very vocal about their needs during this transitional time. Some parents talked about being fascinated by the changes their children were going through; others told us of the heartbreak and hopelessness they feel when their children were totally out of their reach. Parents described the absolute fear and panic they experience when their teens are on the street. Other parents described their frustrations around the clash between their own values and morals and the choices their teens were making. Parents also told us that connecting with other parents who were experiencing the same dilemmas was often more helpful than receiving professional services.

Social workers, caregivers and service providers identified the need for flexible and relevant services for youth. We frequently heard that youth leaving the Ministry's care require ongoing service and support. We also heard that all youth and families who encounter difficulties during this transitional phase need ongoing service and support. (We have addressed the specific issue of support services for youth in the chapter *Alternative Care*.)

Social workers also spoke of the dilemmas they face in their work with youth. They told us that youth they consider to be in need of protection often do not get appropriate service because the services do not exist. Some workers made a strong case for two child protection systems: one for children and one for youth.

Throughout this report we have attempted to reflect the voice of youth. In all chapters, you will find comments from young people. This reflects the importance of what these young people had to say. An overall theme that emerged during our meetings with youth was the need for continuity and stability. We have adopted the need for continuity and stability as a guiding principle of our entire report, as well as of this chapter. The necessity of continuity and stability in families, in alternative care, in programs and in communities must be considered throughout the following discussion on youth.

Young people and their families are asking for help. They desperately need services that meet their needs. They want help to cope with the challenging times in which we live.

Issues

1. Youth and their families

Parents told us that, frequently, when they approached the Ministry of Social Services for help with their teens, the response was not what they had hoped for. They were told, "You can handle it, hang in there," when they clearly would not be calling if they thought they could. Some parents shared their painful stories about reaching their limit. Their only options were asking their child to leave their home or hammering away at the system to find a place for their teens to live. We believe that these families require a range of services that meet their needs and a service delivery system that accepts responsibility for providing these services. In our view, support groups for parents during the time when their children are teens should be as available and natural as prenatal classes.

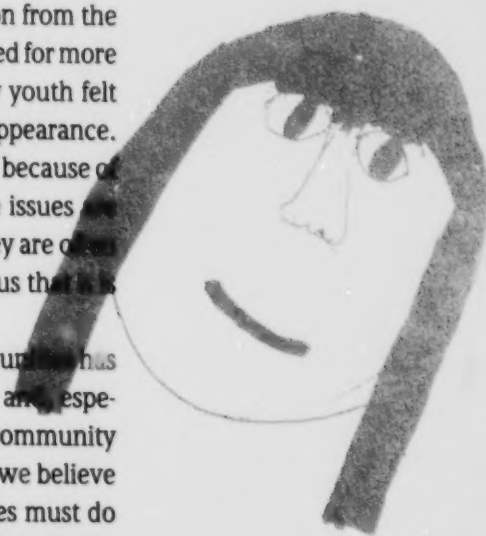
Social workers told us that they get very mixed messages about their role and responsibility in providing service to families who request help. The system has developed the catch-all phrase of "parent/teen conflict" that both underestimates the real needs of families and youth, and creates a dangerous tendency to assess their needs at a very superficial level. Young people and their parents do have conflicts during this transitional time. Conflict is natural. It must be recognized, however, that conflict may be masking more serious problems. Some young people are victims of abuse and neglect during their teens and, clearly, these issues and unique needs must be assessed, rather than just labelled or ignored.

Conflict between parents and young people can be made more intense through a lack of opportunities and by discrimination from the community. Many communities we visited identified the need for more appropriate social and recreational outlets for youth. Many youth felt that they were discriminated against because of their appearance. Youth expressed frustration at not being accepted by society because of the way they dress or the way they wear their hair. These issues are more complex for young people from minority cultures. They are often stereotyped; people from the Vietnamese community told us that it is often assumed that their youth are gang members.

We heard that rapid community growth in some communities has occurred without considering the needs of the community and, especially, of young people. Young people have a place in every community and community planning must include them. Additionally, we believe that all ministries that provide services to youth and families must do so in a coordinated and integrated way — each must recognize its shared responsibilities for youth and families.

"The current system focuses on youth as the problem rather than the problems at work in families and even the whole community. We need a focus on families as well as youth."

Youth in care



Therefore, we recommend that:

1. The Ministry of Social Services must commit sufficient resources to respond to and assess the needs of young people and their families.
2. The Ministry of Social Services must expand and enhance the range of services available to all youth and their families, regardless of whether the youth are in care. These services range from family counselling and mediation services, to safe houses and crisis services for youth.
3. While paying special attention to specific communities, such as isolated and/or ethno-cultural communities, services for youth and their families must be provided consistently throughout the province according to need.

2. Basic needs

It is important to recognize that the basic needs of all youth must be met before any services can be delivered and accepted. We define basic need as the provision of a standard of living adequate for the youth's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. In meeting those basic needs, we must first consider the overall needs of the family. We heard many times that families with youth have greater needs and higher costs. Parents and young people talked to us about the expenses of food, clothing, education and health care. When people cannot meet those needs, they sometimes turn to income assistance. We believe that current income assistance rates are inadequate to meet the needs of families with young people.

Currently, when young people leave home, they generally do not qualify for income support programs available under the *Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act*. The *GAIN Act* specifies age 19 as the age of eligibility; any underage youth who receives income assistance is an exception to that rule. This creates many problems for young people who have no way to meet their basic needs. As a result, they often have no food, no shelter and no clothing.

In our visits to communities, we had many presentations from Financial Assistance Workers (FAWs) who work for the Ministry of Social Services. Currently, these FAWs have the responsibility for assessing whether young people qualify for income assistance. They told us that they do not feel qualified to make these eligibility decisions. Their workloads do not allow them the time to fully explore and assess each individual situation. They also expressed the opinion that the expectation of total independence for many of these young people was

"Financial Assistance Workers are caught in a 'Catch-22' situation as our mandate is to provide basic necessities of life, namely shelter and food, but in issuing to 17- and 18-year-olds living on their own, the other needs (identified in the Family Relations Act and the GAIN Act) are not being met."

**Financial
assistance worker**

unrealistic. Some youth who leave home and apply for income assistance are leaving abusive family situations. FAWs told us they do not have the authority, or in some cases the skills, to assess these situations. If a youth discloses abuse, the youth gets referred to a social worker and is generally bounced back and forth between offices without having his or her needs met.

We believe that families who do not have the resources to meet the basic needs of their teens must be provided with adequate financial resources to do so. Furthermore, the *GAIN Act* must be made more flexible so that youth living apart from their families can meet their basic needs. Youth between the age of 16 and the age of majority must be eligible for short-term assistance to meet their immediate needs as soon as these needs are identified. This short-term assistance may take many forms, including money for food, transportation and housing. Eligibility for ongoing income support must include a thorough assessment of the needs of the youth in context with their families and communities. Many young people who apply for income assistance are in a state of crisis — but so are their families. However, many just need money. A full range of options must be explored with the youth and the family before a determination about ongoing eligibility determination can be made. The determination of eligibility for income assistance cannot be tied to the requirement to seek or accept other services. A wide range of services and programs must be available to meet all the needs of youth.

"They expect people to be accountants; it's impossible to budget \$200 over 30 days."

————— *Street youth*

Therefore, we recommend that:

4. Amendments must be made to the *GAIN Act* to allow youth between age 16 and the age of majority to be eligible for income assistance. Emergency assistance must be available to these youth without conditions. Ongoing assistance must be available and be based on a thorough assessment of the needs of the youth in the context of their families and communities. Eligibility for ongoing financial support must not be tied to the youth's acceptance of services.

3. Sex, drugs and . . .

Youth is the time of rapid change. Young people are grappling with who they are and how they are going to handle a wide range of things such as sexual activity, and alcohol and drug use.

Young people spoke to us about their need for help in coming to terms with their own sexual identity and the increasingly complicated risks brought about by sexual activity. In addition to information about "safe sex", young people also need information about AIDS and other

sexually transmitted diseases.

We heard many anxious concerns about the alarming rise in the teen suicide rate throughout the province. Teens experience emotions with great intensity and are often subject to severe mood swings that may affect their actions, yet there is a distinct lack of mental health services for youth. Because of the particular vulnerability of youth to depression and self-destructive and suicidal tendencies, mental health services for youth must be expanded and enhanced.

Gender preference has become a much more "public" topic, yet there are few services for young people to assist them with questions and concerns they may have. We were struck by the fact that the system is structured to serve heterosexual youth only.

Alcohol and drug abuse is a wide-spread problem for all ages. Young people need programs that are designed for their age-related needs. They also need information about the effects of these abuses, including fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). With the rising use of intravenous drugs and the accompanying risks of AIDS and other diseases, we believe that existing needle exchange programs must be maintained and expanded.

**"Staff who are uncomfortable
with gay/lesbian youth
should leave their morality at
home and concentrate on
support for youth."**

Youth in care

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 5. The ministries of Health, Social Services and Education must jointly fund community-based youth health clinics throughout British Columbia.**
- 6. The Ministry of Education must maintain sex education programs as part of the school curriculum, and these programs must be made available to children in younger grades.**
- 7. Services must be available to all youth regardless of sexual orientation.**
- 8. Needle exchange programs must be maintained and expanded throughout the province.**

4. Youth as parents

We met with a number of young people, particularly young women, who are parents. These young women face all the challenges and difficulties of being young, as well as the added responsibility of parenting. These young parents are particularly vulnerable because they are still children in the eyes of the law and the community, yet they have all the adult responsibilities of raising a child. Many of the young

**"If babies were born with
handbooks it would be easy,
but they're not."**

Teen mother

parents we heard from were disconnected from their families and were living on their own. They spoke openly about the struggle and fear that they face regularly. They took their parenting responsibilities seriously and they told us they needed a secure future to meet the demands of parenthood. Having enough money, housing, education, day care and support programs were their primary concerns.

Teenage pregnancies have increased overall in the last decade. More young people are choosing to parent, but the support structures necessary to assist them as parents are "hit and miss". We heard about some very creative programs for young parents, but we were struck by the absolute lack of such programs in many communities. We also spoke with a number of young fathers who said that not only are there no programs to serve them, but their needs are not even acknowledged by those in the "system". It is critical that the ministries responsible for providing services to youth recognize and provide for the significant needs of young parents.

Therefore, we recommend that:

9. The ministries of Health, Education and Social Services must provide funding and integrated planning for programs to meet the needs of young parents. Communities must be involved in the planning process.
10. Programs targeted specifically for young fathers must be developed.

5. Youth in correctional institutions

We were deeply troubled by our visits to youth in correctional institutions. Most of the youth we spoke with were either in the care of the Ministry of Social Services or had been in the Ministry's care at some point in their lives. Many of these young people had visible, extensive bruising and scars. Some were open about the fact that peer abuse goes on within the facilities. Other injuries were self-inflicted. Many of these young people were hundreds of kilometres away from the people who cared about them. They said that they felt totally disconnected from their families and communities. They had very limited contact with their families and friends. Even more disturbing was the belief expressed by some that nobody cared about them.

Many of these youth talked about what they needed within the institution. They wanted access to anger management programs, alcohol and drug counselling, and flexible education options. They called for advocacy within the system. They also said they needed more

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

time outdoors, and more privacy. The institutions we visited were noisy, sterile and hostile environments.

We spoke to several young people who were about to be released from institutions. They were fearful and panic-stricken. They did not know where they would live or how they would support themselves. We noted an incredible lack of planning on behalf of these young people. Even the youth themselves did not seem involved in planning for their release.

Young people enter institutions because they have broken the law. They break the law, however, for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reason, youth need support, rather than a punitive, corrective environment. We realize that many of these youth have committed very serious crimes and we are not discounting the grave consequences of their actions. We believe, however, that the needs of these young people are the same as the needs of all youth. They need stability and continuity in relationships, as well as a safe place to develop and grow.

All community and institutional programs authorized by the *Young Offenders Act* are delivered through the Ministry of Attorney General. The Ministry of Attorney General is also responsible for a much larger adult corrections system. It is our belief that young people are not served best in a system where the adult corrections model is the focus and the driving force. The adult correction system influences how youth's needs are met within institutions.

The *Young Offenders Act* intends to provide youth with treatment and rehabilitative services but, in our view, the current system, no matter how hard it tries, cannot accomplish this goal.

Frankly, we were appalled by the lack of inter-ministerial planning for young people. The current system can be likened to a game of hot potato: once a youth is in a correctional facility, everybody else drops the potato. Protocols and procedures for the ongoing involvement of families and other ministries while children are in correctional facilities are sadly lacking.

"Youth (in correctional institutions) often effectively lose their child welfare status and have no contact with a social worker."

————— *Youth in care*

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 11. Responsibility for all programs and institutions administered under the *Young Offenders Act* must be transferred from the Ministry of Attorney General to the Ministry of Social Services.**
- 12. All other related ministries must share responsibility for these youth in the community before and after release.**

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

13. The focus of corrections programs for youth must be shifted from the institutions to more community-based programming.
14. An advocacy service must be available within institutions.

6. Youth on the street

Some of our most riveting and dramatic meetings were with "street youth". Some of these youth had run from difficult and often abusive family situations. Many had fled from foster homes and group homes. Others appeared curious and were drawn to the street by the excitement without the survival skills to help them cope.

Greater Vancouver and Victoria have identified a growing street scene for many years. What used to be perceived as a problem of larger, metropolitan centres is now appearing in communities throughout the province. Street workers told us that more youth are on the street, that those youth are younger than those in the past, and that the situation is getting more dangerous. Young people told us that the street is a dangerous and frightening place to be. They talked to us about their lives, and how they cope with juvenile prostitution, criminal activity and drug abuse. They described poverty, inadequate housing and homelessness. They also spoke of being cold and hungry and of dealing with illness without medical coverage. In their opinion, most youth services are irrelevant and unavailable.

We recognize that the government has been aware for some time of the needs of street youth. Attempts at planning programs have been made; however, these programs are often uncoordinated, unreliably funded, and planned in isolation. In many parts of the province, there is very limited service for street youth.

Many youth came forward to present their solutions. They trusted the Community Panel to hear their ideas and to present them to the minister. They recommended services that are accessible day or night, highly visible, street-based, and staffed with well-trained and receptive workers.

We believe these street youth must not be invisible to people living in complacent communities.

Therefore, we recommend that:

15. Services for street youth must be street-based, highly visible, available day and night, and staffed with well-trained and receptive workers.
16. Methods must be established to ensure that street youth have a range of medical services available to them.

"I got stabbed outside my hotel."

Youth

- 17. The Attorney General must enforce all laws that deal with the exploitation of youth.**
- 18. All levels of government and community organizations must plan, coordinate and deliver necessary services to street youth.**

7. Age of majority

A number of people were confused about the disparities surrounding the age of majority. In most other provinces, for instance, the legal age of majority is 18. Within British Columbia, young people can vote in municipal elections when they are 18, but must be 19 to be considered an adult. There are disparities even within the Ministry of Social Services. A youth must be 19 to be eligible for income assistance unless the youth is handicapped. Handicapped youth may apply at 18.

We believe there is a need for a consistent age of majority, and that it should be 18. Having said that, however, we must also reiterate that age should not be a barrier to services. For example, need for services is particularly acute for the disabled. Their needs are magnified by unique situations. Sometimes, services end while disabled youth are still in school. Overwhelmingly, disabled young people expressed a need for government flexibility in meeting their needs beyond the legal age of majority.

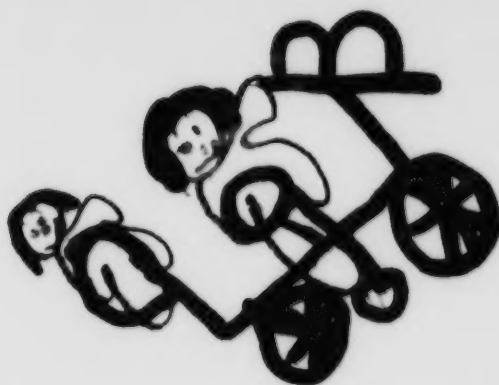
Therefore, we recommend that:

- 19. The legal age of majority must be reduced to 18 years.**

Youth Services Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Social Services must commit sufficient resources to respond to and assess the needs of young people and their families.
2. The Ministry of Social Services must expand and enhance the range of services available to all youth and their families, regardless of whether the youth are in care. These services range from family counselling and mediation services, to safe houses and crisis services for youth.
3. While paying special attention to specific communities, such as isolated and/or ethno-cultural communities, services for youth and their families must be provided consistently throughout the province according to need.
4. Amendments must be made to the *GAIN Act* to allow youth between age 16 and the age of majority to be eligible for income assistance. Emergency assistance must be available to these youth without conditions. Ongoing assistance must be available and be based on a thorough assessment of the needs of the youth in the context of their families and communities. Eligibility for ongoing financial support must not be tied to the youth's acceptance of services.
5. The ministries of Health, Social Services and Education must jointly fund community-based youth health clinics throughout British Columbia.
6. The Ministry of Education must maintain sex education programs as part of the school curriculum, and these programs must be made available to children in younger grades.
7. Services must be available to all youth, regardless of sexual orientation.
8. Needle exchange programs must be maintained and expanded throughout the province.
9. The ministries of Health, Education and Social Services must provide funding and integrated planning for programs to meet the needs of young parents. Communities must be involved in the planning process.

- 10.** Programs targeted specifically for young fathers must be developed.
- 11.** Responsibility for all programs and institutions administered under the *Young Offenders Act* must be transferred from the Ministry of Attorney General to the Ministry of Social Services.
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- 13.** The focus of corrections programs for youth must be shifted from the institutions to more community-based programming.
- 14.** An advocacy service must be available within institutions.
- 15.** Services for street youth must be street-based, highly visible, available day and night, and be staffed with well-trained and receptive workers.
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Service Delivery Structure

"Children and families do not come with compartmentalized needs and problems, and the response system must not respond in compartmentalized ways."

ADVOCACY
ORGANIZATION



1

12

2

Service Delivery Structure

Principles

We believe:

- The ministries that deliver services to families and children must treat all persons with dignity and respect, and consider all their needs.
- To achieve the objective of holistic service, services must be integrated and community-based.
- All administrative and management functions exist to support local service delivery structures, which in turn meet the needs of families and children.

Perspective

As we travelled the province during the past year, it became obvious that people do not understand the way that government services are organized.

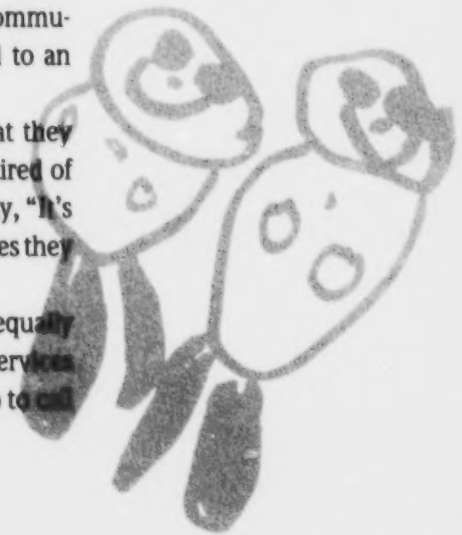
Families told us that finding the services they need was confusing and frustrating. It was a never-ending referral game, in which they were shuffled from one government office to the next. Because no one ministry could provide them with all the services they needed, they felt that different parts of them belonged to different ministries. Getting help meant dealing with too many people. Families perceived that rules within the Ministry of Social Services changed from office to office and from social worker to social worker. They told us that offices often weren't friendly. These concerns were even stronger in ethnic communities, where language barriers and cultural differences added to an already confusing picture.

Youth echoed their parents' complaints. They told us that they wanted to go to just one place to get help, and that they were tired of being sent from office to office and hearing everyone they met say, "It's not my job." They often felt that even when they found the services they needed, they did not qualify for them.

Staff within the Ministry of Social Services find the system equally cumbersome. They told us that connecting up with client services delivered by other ministries is too dependent on knowing who to call

"In our opinion, families are best served by integrated services within the community that work in a preventative manner."

Service provider



"We need a coordinated network of government services with a coordinated response."

Community Agency

and what to say. They feel the system does not encourage cooperation or communication between ministries, which makes planning and problem-solving difficult. They shared stories of attending inter-ministerial meetings where decision-making was impossible, because everyone at the table had a different level of authority. Some staff talked about the idea of creating a single ministry that would be responsible for services for families and children.

Caregivers told us that the inconsistencies between ministries are detrimental to the service that can be delivered. Each ministry they deal with has different expectations, standards, information sharing practices and reporting mechanisms.

In hearing all of these comments and views, it became clear that people want a change in the service delivery structure. This issue is not new. We talked with people who have conducted various studies in communities throughout the province to determine the needs of families and children: for example, the Kamloops Mayor's Task Force on Children and Youth, the Asian Youth Task Force in Vancouver, the Ombudsman's Public Report #22 on Public Services to Children, Youth and their Families in British Columbia: The Need for Integration . . . and the list goes on. Each of these reports has drawn the same conclusion: that services must be integrated, locally based, and designed solely for the purpose of meeting the needs of families and children.

Issues

1. Service structure

1.1 Provincial

Government services for families and children are currently provided by the ministries of Social Services, Health, Education, and Attorney General. Each ministry operates independently, with its own administrative and management structure, budget and geographic boundaries. While there are no legislative barriers to communication and cooperation between ministries, the current structure does not facilitate them. Thus services are inconsistent, uncoordinated and compartmentalized.

Efforts have been made over the years to integrate and control services for families and children. The most recent was the establishment of the Child and Youth Secretariat and regional Child and Youth Committees. Despite the tremendous efforts of staff at the local level, we believe that this structure has not had the desired impact.

Therefore, we propose the following significant changes at both the local level and within the administrative structures of the individual ministries that provide services to families and children. This is a

"It's a multi-system problem and it's about time we used the dollars on our people instead of the exterior issues . . . when it's our families who are the core of society . . ."

Parent

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

massive undertaking, but we believe that only by adopting all of these changes will we achieve a holistic approach that puts people first.

On a provincial level, the following issues must be addressed:

- **Lack of a common philosophy and values.**

We believe the word "mandate" should be abolished, because it is too often used as an excuse for not providing specific services. "It's not our mandate; it's theirs" is too common a refrain. This blaming and buck-passing must stop. We believe that it can be alleviated if the work of all ministries is based upon a philosophy that puts families and children first and is integrated at a local level.

- **Lack of a common service language.**

Currently, each ministry has its own internal language. This creates communication problems and general confusion. The different ministries, for example, have different names for children's beds. Within one receiving home, one might find a bail bed (Ministry of Attorney General), an emergency bed (Social Services), a respite bed (Social Services), and an Intensive Child Care Resource bed (Social Services). Such differences in terminology are confusing to everyone.

"Ministries involved . . . act in isolation from each other."

Government Staff

- **Lack of a common financial system and policies.**

Each ministry currently develops its budget differently and structures it for its own needs. Thus, while budgets are debated in the legislature at the same time, they are not easily compared. A Child and Youth Committee (CYC), for example, tried to determine how much had been spent on contract services in their city. The CYC was unable to even have a meaningful discussion of budgets, let alone compare them, because budgets were described differently in each ministry.

- **Lack of a common set of geographic boundaries.**

Each ministry has different geographic boundaries. This is a major barrier to integrated planning. We believe that boundaries must be rationalized and suggest that current school district boundaries be considered for adoption by all ministries. School districts are already community-based, can be responsive to change and development within the community, carry no stigma and are universally understood.

- **Lack of consistent privacy rules and information sharing practices.**

If ministries are to work together effectively, they must agree on how information is to be shared. This issue is elaborated on in the chapter, *Access to Information*.

- **Lack of compatible management and administrative structures that support frontline decision-making.**

Ministries have different management structures and levels of decision-making authority. These bureaucratic structures severely limit inter-ministry program planning. For example, we heard from a manager in the Ministry of Social Services who had worked closely with the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of Health to develop a community program for juvenile sex offenders. All three ministries acknowledged the need for the program and all acknowledged their responsibilities. Because of different levels of decision-making authority, only two out of three could commit funds to proceed. Thus the program could not be developed.

"The current system creates fragmented support, gaps, overlaps. The needs of families and children are neglected."

————— *Government Staff*

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. The ministries of Health, Social Services, Attorney General and Education must adopt a common philosophy and common values, develop a common service language and a compatible financial system and policies, adopt a common set of geographic boundaries, consistent privacy rules and information sharing practices, and develop compatible management and administrative structures to support the delivery of services from local, integrated centres.
2. Ministries must work together when planning, developing and expanding services for families and children.

1.2 Local

On a local level, we believe that ministry staff who provide services to families and children must work together and share space. This would mean creating neighbourhood-based, integrated offices that would include staff from the Ministry of Health (public health, child and youth mental health, alcohol and drug programs), the Ministry of Social Services (family and child services, services for the developmentally disabled), the Ministry of Attorney General (youth probation officers),

and, where appropriate, the Ministry of Education and other ministries that provide services to families and children.

Communities have made it clear that they have a role to play. We believe they should help determine the specifics of each centre. School or community centres might be used by some communities, while others might choose to build new structures. In all instances, centres must be welcoming and attractive. There is a stigma currently attached to seeking services. People must feel comfortable with the centres on both a physical and an emotional level. Hours of operation must be based on the needs of families and children, not on administrative convenience. Information must be understandable, culturally appropriate and available in different languages.

Each centre must have a community-based mechanism that would ensure that the centre is responding to the characteristics of the host community. Community bodies already in place, such as social planning councils, may be able to take on this role. If there are no such structures, some form of mechanism should be established.

We have considered including income support programs in this integrated centre, but have concluded that doing so is not appropriate. Income support is a basic right, and we believe it should therefore stand alone, apart from support services.

Therefore, we recommend that:

3. Direct services to families and children provided by the Ministry of Health (public health, child and youth mental health, alcohol and drug programs), Ministry of Social Services (family and child services, services for the developmentally disabled), and the Ministry of Attorney General (youth probation officers) must be delivered out of neighbourhood-based, integrated centres.
4. Staff from the Ministry of Education and other ministries that provide direct and related services to families and children must be included in these centres (see recommendation No. 3) where appropriate.
5. Each service centre must have the following characteristics: hours of operation that respond to the needs of families and children; accessibility for the disabled; respect for and responsiveness to the specific ethnic communities involved; and a welcoming environment.

"They put you on hold 'till lunch time, then they close the office until 1 p.m."

Youth

"Services are fragmented — everybody has a little piece of the pie — we need places for families."

**Community
service provider**

6. Community-based mechanisms must be established to ensure that each centre is responding to the needs of the host community.

1.3 Whose responsibility?

We must also point out that, while these recommendations have been made before, action has not been taken. Therefore, we believe that we must be specific about who will have responsibility for implementing this service structure and about the time frames required.

Therefore, we recommend that:

7. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy must mandate and direct the development and implementation of this integrated system.
8. Government must appoint a Select Committee of the Legislature on Families and Children. One of its functions will be to monitor and evaluate this integrated system.
9. Implementation of the integrated system must be completed in three years.

2. A single ministry?

Many people have suggested creating a single ministry within government to be responsible for services to children and families. We do not support this for several reasons.

First, each ministry that delivers services to families and children also delivers many other services. We see strengths in this system, as it keeps families and children on everyone's agenda. Furthermore, any reorganization to change this structure would be massive, taking away energy from the real job of delivering direct services to families and children. Second, it is important to maintain the professional identification within individual ministries: for example, school counsellors within the education system, and psychiatric social workers within the mental health branch of the Ministry of Health. Finally, we are concerned that a "superministry" would be so large that it would further isolate management from frontline work, increasing the potential to "ghettoize" families and children.

3. Contracted services

Services delivered directly by the provincial government represent only a portion of the service delivery picture. Historically, there has always been a mix of services delivered directly by government, and

"A children's ministry is not necessary because it would be too disruptive and too large."

Social worker

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

indirectly through contracted agencies. Increasingly over the last ten years, the government has been delivering more services through contracted agencies.

There are approximately 4 500 full-time positions within the Ministry of Social Services, as compared to the equivalent of approximately 10 500 full-time positions within the ministry-funded agencies. The current budget for contracted services is \$315 million, triple that of 1982. This illustrates the magnitude of the shift in the manner in which services are being delivered.

We heard a number of comments and opinions on this issue, ranging from the belief that all services should be delivered by government to calls for all services to be taken out of government. Following is a partial list of the concerns that were raised:

- The relationship between government and its funded agencies is confusing and inconsistent. The amount of control government exercises over agencies varies.
- There is a lack of clarity about roles and what is expected of Ministry of Social Services staff in dealing with funded agencies.
- There are no consistent standards and policies for contracted services, or mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring them.
- Much of the family support work is contracted out, leaving government social workers to deal only with crisis-focused intervention.
- The community is confused about who does what job.
- The number of funded agencies and the overall lack of coordination compounds an already confusing maze that families must negotiate to find appropriate services.
- There are questions about whether government should contract with "for-profit" agencies or non-profit agencies.
- There are concerns about the size and growth of some of the non-profit agencies that deliver services.
- There are concerns regarding the use of large corporate enterprises delivering family support services.
- Staff stability and continuity in service provision are issues because funding agencies receive contracts on a yearly basis.

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Typically, the salaries within funded agencies are less than those within government.
- There is concern about how service providers and caregivers are certified.

It is our understanding that the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and the Public Sector, currently under way, will include a major review of government contracting policies and procedures. We welcome this initiative, as we believe these issues must be addressed.

Therefore, we recommend that:

10. The Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and the Public Sector must address the issues cited in this report in its review of government contracting policies and procedures.



Service Delivery Structure Recommendations

1. The ministries of Health, Social Services, Attorney General, and Education must adopt a common philosophy and common values, develop a common service language and a compatible financial system and policies, adopt a common set of geographic boundaries, consistent privacy rules and information-sharing practices, and develop compatible management and administrative structures to support the delivery of services from local, integrated centres.
2. Ministries must work together when planning, developing and expanding services for families and children.
3. Direct services to families and children provided by the Ministry of Health (public health, child and youth mental health, alcohol and drug programs), Ministry of Social Services (family and child services, services for the developmentally disabled), and the Ministry of Attorney General (youth probation officers) must be delivered out of neighbourhood-based, integrated centres.
4. Staff from the Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights and other ministries that provide direct and related services to families and children must be included in these centres (see recommendation No. 3) where appropriate.
5. Each service centre must have the following characteristics: hours of operation that respond to the needs of families and children; accessibility for the disabled; respect for and responsiveness to the specific ethnic communities involved; and a welcoming environment.
6. Community-based mechanisms must be established to ensure that each centre is responding to the needs of the host community.
7. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy must mandate and direct the development and implementation of this integrated system.
8. Government must appoint a Select Committee of the Legislature on Families and Children. One of its functions will be to monitor and evaluate this integrated system.

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- 9.** Implementation of the integrated system must be completed in three years.
- 10.** The Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and the Public Sector must address the issues cited in this report in its review of government contracting policies and procedures.



Guardianship: Past and Future

"To me good child welfare has to be built on the notion that you are the parent forever and ever. Nobody or the law can remove that right from you. The legislation is wrong if it tries to overlook that reality."

PARENT



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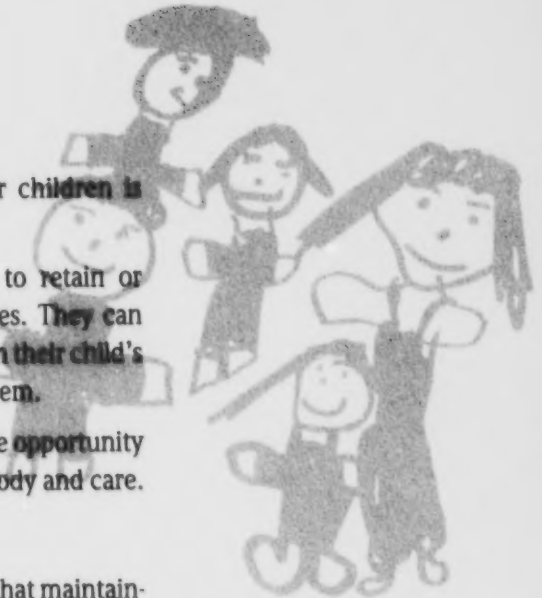
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Guardianship: Past and Future

Principles

We believe:

- The bond between birth families and their children is never extinguished.
- Families should be expected and enabled to retain or resume their custody and care responsibilities. They can remain as closely involved as is consistent with their child's welfare, even if the child cannot live with them.
- Children and youth must be provided with the opportunity to participate in all decisions concerning custody and care.



Perspective

Many who made submissions to the panel believed that maintaining children's connections with their family of origin, their history and their heritage is of vital importance. Again and again, we heard "don't cut me off from my roots." Sometimes children need to be removed from their family to protect them or to provide for their care, but this removal should not lead to a loss of children's connection with the family of origin. Also, we heard from caregivers and staff that caregivers should be given more recognition and more authority to make day-to-day decisions.

We heard concerns from parents who were permanently denied access to their children and from youth in care who wanted to live with their birth parents. Youth complained that they were not told of important events, such as deaths, that occurred in their birth families. Social workers expressed frustration that they were unable to provide birth family information to some children simply because the information was not available. Many caregivers vented frustrations about being unable to make minor decisions (such as giving permission to go on field trips) without first getting the approval of the child's social worker, who might be unavailable. Similarly, social workers felt they lacked authority to delegate decisions to caregivers. These stories, and many more

"The Act must stress and value the family of origin."

_____ *Social worker*

"No one can replace the bonds of family in a child's life."

_____ *Foster parent*

like them, have shaped our perspective, which can be summarized in five points:

1. Children may live apart from their birth families, but the bond with their family and their heritage cannot be broken.
2. Birth families and their children should be able to maintain a relationship consistent with the child's welfare even if the family is unable to provide care for the child on a short- or long-term basis. This bond between children and their birth families must be recognized.
3. Most birth families want to maintain some level of involvement in their children's lives, regardless of where they are living.
4. We must recognize and support the strengths of all family relationships.
5. Caregivers must have the authority to make routine decisions concerning their children's day-to-day welfare.

Issues

1. Guardianship

Generally, "guardianship" is regarded as a term that implies legal ownership. Historically, the guardian had not only duties of care, but rights to own the fruits of the child's labour. As a legal definition, guardianship includes the largest scope of rights and responsibilities that can attach to the parent or legally appointed substitute for the parent. In current law, when a child is committed permanently to government care or when a child is adopted, full guardianship passes to the government or adoptive parents. The rights, obligations and responsibilities of birth parents are extinguished.

There is confusion in the public conception of guardianship. Many think of a guardian as a substitute parent, such as a court-appointed guardian where the parents have died. "Guardianship" is defined in provincial family legislation, but the terms "custody" and "care" are often used instead, by both the public and the courts. In the federal *Divorce Act*, "custody" is the term used mainly, and it has been extended by the courts to the full scope of "guardianship". Because of these trends and the confusion over "guardianship", the term has been abolished in some jurisdictions.¹

We propose a departure from the current use of the word "guardianship". Instead of using it as a broad catch-all term, we propose



"It is a tragedy that the bond between my daughter and her son were destroyed. The damage and scars this will leave on my daughter and her son, 4 1/2, can never be repaired."

Grandparent

that the term "guardianship" be completely abolished and be replaced by the terms "kinship", "custody" and "care". In so doing, we wish to stress our belief that the bond between families and their children is never broken, regardless of the legal arrangements made on behalf of the child.

1.1 Kinship

Definition: The significant bond between birth families and their children.

Kinship is a public and legal statement of the importance of the existing bond between birth families and their children. Because it is based in a biological relationship that cannot be altered, kinship cannot be transferred, denied, terminated or extinguished by any act of legislation. Kinship is a significant birth connection that needs to be legally recognized and enshrined in provincial legislation. Our definition of kinship retains the existing practice of distinguishing between the person and the estate. Under current law, guardianship of the estate is granted separately to a substitute parent, an adoptive parent or the Public Trustee. In short, financial entitlements such as inheritances are dealt with in a separate legal structure, under the *Infants Act*. We propose to leave "guardianship of the estate" intact when defining kinship. Likewise, during a transitional period, we propose to define custody without dismantling the existing concept of guardianship of the estate.

1.2 Custody

Definition: The total responsibility for the well-being of the child.

Unlike kinship, which is a bond between birth families and their children, custody is the authority that enables the custodian to develop long-term plans, to make decisions, and to advocate on behalf of the child in accordance with the principles of this report. Custody includes financial responsibility for the child and the responsibility to provide the child with quality care or to arrange, monitor and evaluate care. Custodians have an explicit obligation to foster a healthy connection between birth families and the child and to inform the birth parents concerning the child's well-being. Our definition of custody includes the belief that the birth family should be included in decision-making wherever possible. Because custody is a legal relationship, rather than a bond, it can be transferred or terminated. Decisions made by the custodian include, but are not limited to, the placement of the child, significant medical and psychological treatment, education options, marriage and travel outside the country.

"These 'denied' children become permanently deprived of an inherent right."

Grandmother

"Delegate more day-to-day authority to foster parents."

Social worker

1.3 Care

Definition: The authority to meet the day-to-day needs of the child.

Care is the authority that enables the caregiver to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of the child on a day-to-day basis, consistent with the child's heritage. Caregivers are responsible for making short-term plans for the child and for providing information and advice to custodians concerning long-term plans being made on the child's behalf. They are also responsible for informing custodians regarding the child's welfare. Caregivers have the authority to make decisions concerning routine medical treatment and procedures, and social and recreational activities. These include, but are not limited to, authorizing emergency medical procedures, authorizing routine medication, making short-term travel plans, joining clubs or teams, and participating in field trips and school or social group activities.

As with custody, care is a legal relationship that can be terminated or transferred.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. Common law meanings of "guardianship of the person of the child" must be abolished to prevent legal disputes over conflicting meaning. In new legislation, the term "guardianship of the person" must be eliminated and other related provincial legislation follow suit in stages.
2. The term "kinship" be defined as the significant bond between birth families and their children and be included in the new legislation.
3. The term "custody" must be defined as the total responsibility for the well-being of the child and be included in the new legislation.
4. The term "care" must be defined as the authority to meet the day-to-day needs of the child and be included in the new legislation.

2. Shared parenting

Definition: Voluntary division of custody and care responsibilities between the legal custodians and the government.

While provision exists within the current legislation for children to enter the government's care through short-term custody agreements and special care agreements, these agreements are inflexible and allow families insufficient custody and care options because of the way they

are prescribed by legislation and policy. These agreements do not take our new definitions of custody and care into account.

We believe that agreements must be negotiated to meet the individual needs of families and children and that flexible options must be made available. Shared parenting is such an arrangement. Legal custodians and the government can enter into negotiated shared parenting agreements that address both the general concerns (such as service requirements and time frames), as well as other special considerations (such as heritage, religion and the involvement of the extended family). Shared parenting always refers to a relationship between legal custodians and the government. As such, shared parenting differs from the more familiar term "joint custody", which is a custody arrangement between two individuals without government involvement.

Therefore, we recommend that:

5. Provision must be made for shared parenting agreements in the new legislation.

3. Adoption

Definition: The life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship (the bond between the child and the birth family).

Under current legislation, adopted children are considered to be "as if born to" the adoptive family, meaning that the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the birth family are permanently extinguished. Our new definition of adoption is significantly different from that which now exists in the *Adoption Act*.

We have concluded that the notion of "as if born to" is not realistic in these times. We want to redefine the word "adoption" from its current use as a term equated with permanent ownership. Our redefinition of adoption is consistent with our understanding of kinship, which is based on the principle that the bond between children and their birth family and heritage cannot be extinguished. It is consistent with the direction of current adoption practices, which are tending toward increasing openness and access to information.

We recognize that the issue of adoption is a high-profile and sensitive family issue. We heard that adoption is not a single entity, that is, the placement of newborn infants. Adoption encompasses a range of options along the alternative care continuum. Adoption includes the placement of infants, special needs children, older children, and children from other countries. In all of these situations, we believe that kinship is never extinguished. However, within each adoption place-

"Adoption is a relationship, not a transaction. More accurately, it is a series of inter-relationships that are life-long, whether there is ongoing contact or not."

**Adoption
service provider**

ment, the degree of contact shared between birth families and adoptive parents will be based on needs and capacities of all parties. A common element of all adoptions must be the right of all parties to receive full information and the recognition of the need to preserve and honour a child's birth family heritage.

Our new definition of adoption will require a transition phase, a comprehensive review of adoption options and practices, new legislation, and considerable public education. (Access to information issues are addressed in the chapter, *Access to Information*.) As well, the implications of the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption, due for ratification by Canada in 1993, should be reviewed by the provincial government.

Therefore, we recommend that:

6. The term "adoption" must be defined as the life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship, which is the bond between the child and the birth family.
7. Adoption, as defined in this report, must be incorporated into new legislation following a thorough review of all issues related to adoption. This review and integration must not delay the new legislation.

4. Self-custody

Many youth in care or formerly in care told us that they would like to **make** decisions for themselves and take full responsibility for their **actions**. They felt that they needed a role in making decisions about their future and that there may be circumstances when custody by either their parents or the government was not in their best interests. Sometimes youth are the best people to judge when to terminate a **custodial relationship**. Youth were asking for complete independence; **we call** this self-custody. Self-custody is not a legally recognized option **at present**. The only way youth manage to get self-custody now is to **reject their parents** or the government without their approval, often **leading them** to life on the street.

Youth in self-custody would have full responsibility for all long-term planning, finances, decision-making and care. Essentially, self-custody would confer adult status on a youth between age 16 and the age of majority, while retaining legal restrictions such as the inability to vote or consume alcohol. To be implemented equitably, self-custody would have to be an option open to all youth between age 16 and the age of majority, not just those in the custody of the government or

someone other than their birth family. Self-custody should apply equally to all youth. Action to obtain self-custody must be initiated by the youth, not by family members.

We believe that the major issue regarding self-custody is assessing a youth's competency. Clearly, it would not be enough for a youth merely to declare independence while under the age of majority. While some youth may be capable of taking care of themselves, many are overconfident of their abilities. To allow all youth to have self-custody just because they might wish it could put some of them at risk of harm and undermine the principles set forth in this report. As a safeguard, it seems reasonable to establish an adjudication process. In this process, a youth could obtain self-custody by going through an application procedure, being assessed for suitability on the basis of consistent criteria and presenting a case before an adjudicating body, such as the community tribunal described in the chapter *Dispute Resolution*. Implementing self-custody would require a highly individualized youth support system to allow the assessment of each application for self-custody on its own merits.

Some jurisdictions, notably California, have enacted self-custody legislation. The experience of these jurisdictions should be reviewed.

Therefore, we recommend that:

8. The option of self-custody must be available to youth from the age of 16 years to the age of majority through an adjudicated process, and a review must be conducted concerning appropriate criteria and suitability tests for self-custody.

5. Group custody

There is no provision in the current *Family and Child Service Act* for group custody — the custody of a child by an extended family grouping, kinship network, clan or band rather than by an individual or the government. The group custody concept would enhance the flexibility of the child welfare system by providing another option for making the most appropriate custody arrangements for children. It would meet some of the concerns of the province's ethnic and racial communities, many of which have long-standing and successful traditions of group custody. Group custody may allow children more options, such as remaining in their culture of origin.

Therefore, we recommend that:

9. The new legislation must enable groups to obtain custody.

6. Role of the Superintendent of Family and Child Service

Under the present system, the provincial government has a single, central authority known as the Superintendent of Family and Child Service. Under the existing *Family and Child Service Act*, the Superintendent has the powers to administer the *Family and Child Service Act*; to apprehend a child with or without a warrant; to have the ultimate responsibility for children in government custody and to place these children in care; and, by court order, to supervise the care of a child who is in a parent's custody. (This list is representative of the Superintendent's powers and is not all-inclusive.)

Under the *Adoption Act*, the Superintendent has the power to consent to the adoption of a permanent ward, to comply with certain requests under the active and passive adoption registries, to use discretion in disclosing certain information to parties to an adoption, and to administer this Act.

Under the *Family Relations Act*, the Superintendent advises and assists birth parents and becomes the custodian under Supreme Court orders or in the case where a child is left without a custodian. The Superintendent has the authority to delegate these responsibilities.

Additionally, and without any statutory powers, the Superintendent has assumed the role of a standard setter and an inspector and auditor of services, and has become an advocate with little statutory guidance.

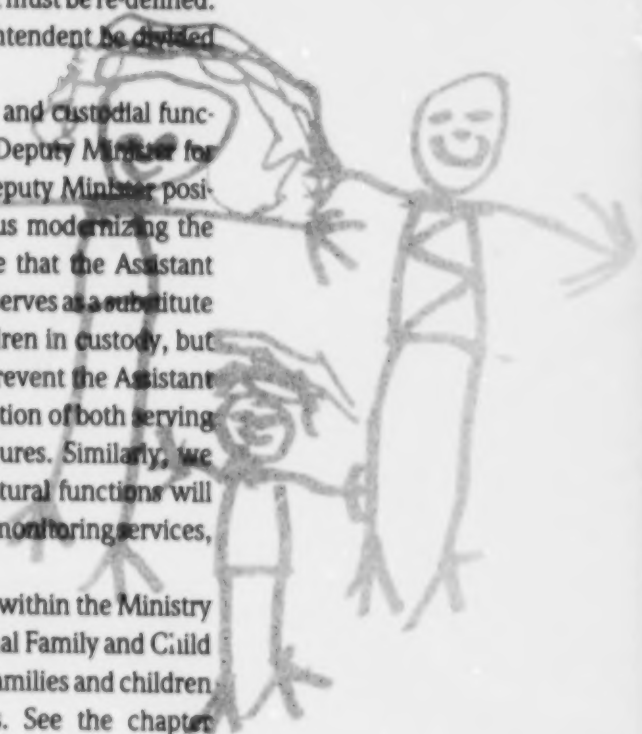
The above list of statutory and assumed responsibilities creates two major problems. First, although the Superintendent has custodial authority, the position rarely deals directly with children and their situations but instead deals with them at an impersonal and bureaucratic level. The position may have administrative responsibility, but does not necessarily have the ultimate responsibility to provide the services or directly control the staff who may deliver the services. For example, under the *Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act* (GAIN Act), the Superintendent administers services such as residential and child care services, but funding is the responsibility of the Minister of Social Services. Furthermore, even if the Superintendent had the responsibility for the provision of services, the position could not be self-regulating while also auditing the delivery of those services, without creating a conflict of interest.

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

We believe that the role of the Superintendent must be re-defined. We propose that the responsibilities of the Superintendent be divided into two parts.

The Superintendent's present administrative and custodial functions would continue to reside with an Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services. This Assistant Deputy Minister position will replace the Superintendent position, thus modernizing the name used for the Superintendent. We recognize that the Assistant Deputy Minister of Family and Children's Services serves as a substitute parent and, as such, is a natural advocate for children in custody, but we feel that an external advocate is necessary to prevent the Assistant Deputy Minister from entering the untenable situation of both serving and fighting against Ministry policies and procedures. Similarly, we recognize that the Assistant Deputy Minister's natural functions will include setting standards of service, inspecting and monitoring services, and handling complaints.

We believe that these organizational changes within the Ministry must be complemented by the creation of an external Family and Child Advocacy Office that will advocate on behalf of all families and children concerning all systemic family and child issues. See the chapter *Advocacy* for more information.



Therefore, we recommend that:

10. The term "Superintendent" must be replaced by "Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services".
11. The Ministry of Social Services must place all administrative functions, including custodial authority and service provision, with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services.
12. An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases on a regional basis.

In England, the source of our common law definition of "guardianship", the term has been abolished in child welfare legislation (*The Children's Act, 1989*).

Guardianship Recommendations

1. Common law meanings of "guardianship of the person of the child" should be abolished to prevent legal disputes over conflicting meaning. In new legislation, the term "guardianship of the person" must be eliminated and other related provincial legislation follow suit in stages.
2. The term "kinship" must be defined as the significant bond between birth families and their children and be included in the new legislation.
3. The term "custody" must be defined as the total responsibility for the well-being of the child and be included in the new legislation.
4. The term "care" must be defined as the authority to meet the day-to-day needs of the child and be included in the new legislation.
5. Provision must be made for shared parenting agreements in the new legislation.
6. The term "adoption" must be defined as the life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship, which is the bond between the child and the birth family.
7. Adoption, as defined in this report, must be incorporated into new legislation following a thorough review of all issues related to adoption. This review and integration must not delay the new legislation.
8. The option of self-custody must be available to youth from the age of 16 years to the age of majority through an adjudicated process and a review must be conducted concerning appropriate criteria and suitability tests for self-custody.
9. The new legislation must enable groups to obtain custody.
10. The term "Superintendent" must be replaced by "Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services".

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- 11.** The Ministry of Social Services must place all administrative functions, including custodial authority and service provision, with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services.
- 12.** An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases on a regional basis.



Dispute Resolution

*"Remove (the)
win/lose approach
to conflict resolution.
Family relationships
need win/win
solutions or
everyone loses."*

LAWYER



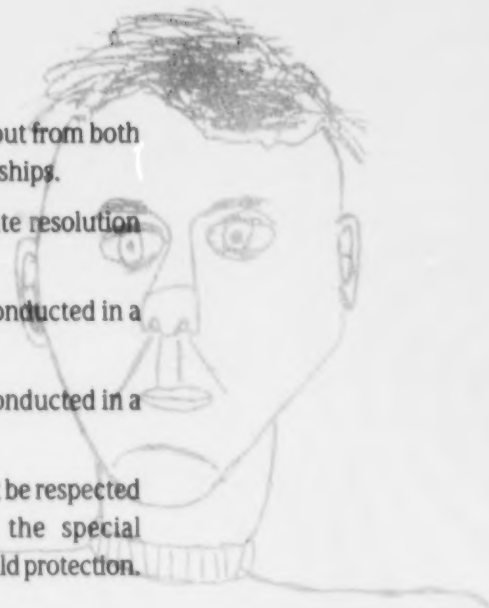


Dispute Resolution

Principles

We believe:

- Disputes are a natural part of life and come about from both societal conditions and interpersonal relationships.
- Families need access to a continuum of dispute resolution mechanisms.
- The adjudication of family disputes must be conducted in a timely manner.
- The adjudication of family disputes must be conducted in a culturally competent manner.
- The needs and opinions of all participants must be respected within an environment that recognizes the special vulnerability of families within the context of child protection.



Perspective

Families feel extremely vulnerable when their abilities to care for children are questioned. This feeling of vulnerability is compounded by the confrontational manner in which child protection matters are investigated. The continued dependence on the adversarial court system has led to an under-valuing of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

The child protection system relies on the courts. However, we frequently heard complaints that the court system was not working effectively, especially in resolving child protection disputes. We do not intend to single out individuals, but direct our comments toward systemic problems in the court system. Under the current legislation, the courts are the only option available to the public, resulting in a system that is overloaded, backlogged and unresponsive. The intent of the current legislation was to have family matters brought before the courts quickly. In reality, while the process must commence within 45 days, the hearing may not occur for months. This lack of access and availability means that important decisions concerning the welfare of children and their families cannot be made within the time frames intended by the Act. Lives are left in limbo.

"... parents report feeling frustrated, put-down, helpless, not listened to, ashamed, terrified, made to feel guilty, angry, and/or discouraged. In essence, they felt that their needs were not responded to appropriately or effectively."

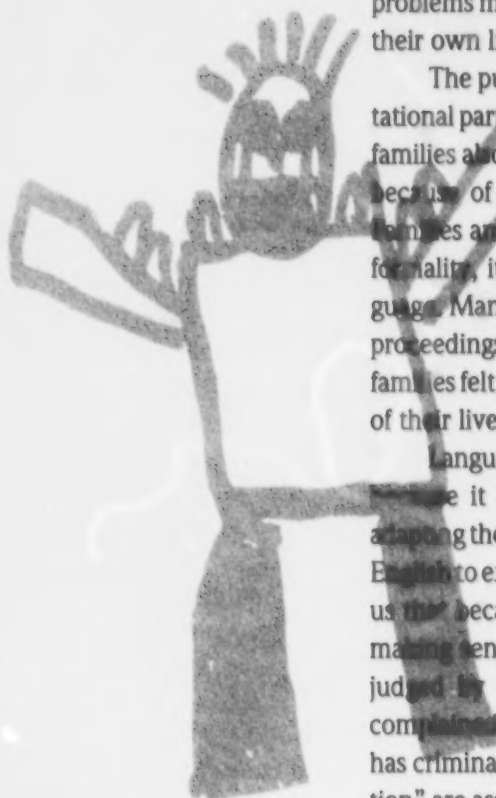
Advocacy group

The devastation that the majority of families experience when children are removed is compounded by the added stress level associated with a court hearing. Families and youth told us that they often felt that the judge did not understand their situation. Social workers often stated that they felt some judges lacked specific training and interest in family matters. Furthermore, they felt family cases are often considered less important than criminal or small claims cases, often causing the postponement of family hearings. In some locations, we heard that courtroom availability and scheduling were added difficulties. These problems make families and youth feel vulnerable and powerless about their own lives.

The public perceives the court system as adversarial and confrontational partly because of its "win or lose" adjudication structure. Many families also feel that there is a social stigma associated with the courts because of the commonly held belief that courts are for criminals. Families and youth are alienated from the court system because of its formality, its requirement for legal expertise, and its specialized language. Many families told us stories of being confused about the court proceedings and of not understanding the results of the hearing. Often, families felt that they didn't know the rules of the game and that control of their lives was being taken by lawyers and social workers.

Language is a barrier, not only because of its technical nature, but because it forces families to fit into the court system, rather than adapting the courts to the needs of the families. Families who do not use English to express family concepts, or who are not fluent in English, told us that because of inadequate translation services they had difficulty making sense of the language used at hearings. In addition, they felt judged by a system that did not understand their cultures. They complained that even the language used by the child protection system has criminal connotations. Words like "apprehension" and "investigation" are associated with actions that are interventionist and intrusive. As well, a report by the Ministry of Social Services Staff Advisory Committee on Multiculturalism notes that a word such as "apprehension" can be translated only as "arrest" or "capture" in some languages, thus increasing the confrontational and criminal associations connected with child protection.¹

To address these problems, we propose a continuum of dispute resolution processes that encourages family and community involvement, and that is accessible, available and timely, while being less formal and less adversarial than the current court system.



Issues

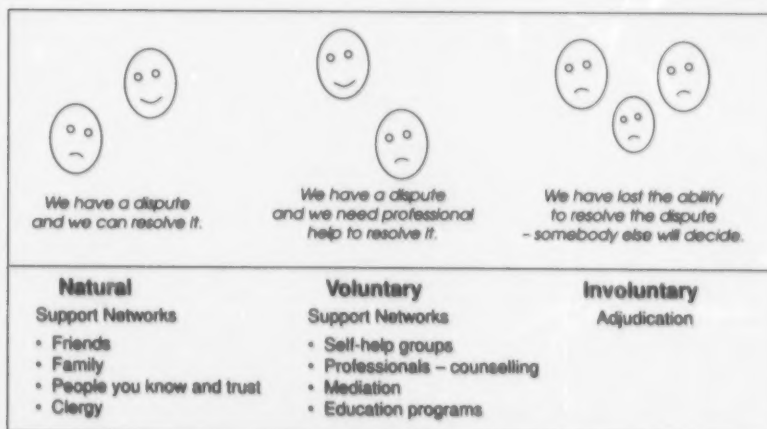
1. Continuum of dispute resolution options

There are many types of disputes and they all vary in their impact upon family life. Some disputes, like sibling rivalry, disagreements over bedtime or marital arguments, are a common part of family life and may be resolved without any assistance from outside the family. We believe that many early disputes can be resolved by voluntary dispute resolution mechanisms. For example, those disputes that occur inside the family can be resolved through natural and voluntary support systems. At the other end of the continuum are disputes that question the integrity of family life, involve the government, and may include the removal of children from the home. These disputes over child protection are resolved by imposed adjudication.

The courts have been used extensively in child protection disputes. Not only does this tendency create a tremendous backlog in the court system, it fails to recognize other, less adversarial means of resolving disputes. We believe that disputes are resolved most successfully when those in dispute are empowered to make their own decisions and to participate in the resolution process. Many alternatives presently exist but are not recognized or used by those in dispute. Publicizing existing options, teaching dispute resolution methods, and developing new mechanisms would contribute significantly to enhancing the use of dispute resolution options in place of the courts. Regardless of the dispute resolution process used, having an advocate available at all levels of dispute resolution must be encouraged.

Many models of dispute resolution continuums exist in varying degrees of complexity. We have chosen to describe our continuum as consisting of three parts:

- natural support
- voluntary support
- adjudication.



Therefore, we recommend that:

1. The structure of all dispute resolution mechanisms must recognize and respect the special vulnerability of families and be as non-adversarial as possible.

1.1 Natural support

At the natural support level of dispute resolution, families and children seek advice or a listening ear from people they trust. Seeking this support is voluntary and, most often, initiated by any family member rather than by someone outside the family. Because disputes are a natural part of life, families usually develop natural support mechanisms to resolve their difficulties. At this level of dispute resolution, the families make all decisions to resolve the dispute. They may try various options such as negotiating to reach a mutual agreement, asking advice from relatives and friends, reading self-help or how-to books to increase their knowledge and dispute resolution skills, or seeking advice from people they know and trust. The choice of these natural supports may vary according to the nature of the problem, the personalities of those involved, or the availability of the supports.

**"Partnership is attainable
by engaging community
and family in resolving
difficulties."**

———— Community agency

Therefore, we recommend that:

2. The Ministry of Social Services must respect and work with the available natural support networks of families to resolve disputes.

1.2 Voluntary support

Voluntary support is similar to natural support because both are initiated and chosen by the family. Voluntary support is a step beyond natural support because it involves seeking advice, counsel or help from trained professionals, such as counsellors, social workers, lawyers or psychiatrists. Voluntary support includes self-help groups and networks, education programs and mediation. Usually, families or the government must pay money for the provision of these voluntary services. As on any continuum, the distinction between natural and voluntary support is not clear cut. We wish to highlight two types of voluntary support: mediation and education.

Mediation

Within the voluntary support system, there is a growing social acceptance of mediation as a method of dispute resolution. Mediation has been tried in many jurisdictions; the Ministry of Social Services is currently conducting a Mediation Pilot Project that will be useful in

providing information concerning the development and implementation of mediation services for family support.

In mediation, two parties agree to try to find the common ground between them in an environment that attempts to equalize the power imbalance. They enter into mediation because they want to find a mutual solution that will maintain the significance of the relationship between the parties after mediation while meeting as many needs of each party as possible. During mediation, a mediator facilitates discussions between the disputing parties in an attempt to work out an agreement. Decision-making rests with the parties involved in the dispute, rather than with the mediator. Mediators come from a wide range of backgrounds but require special training to prepare them for this work.

We enter the area of mediation in child welfare very cautiously. We do not believe that mediation is a "cure-all". Mediation cannot be used to find facts. We are also concerned that victims of family violence should not enter a process that has the potential to further victimize them. For example, a teen who has been sexually abused should not be forced to "resolve" this through mediation with the offender.

We believe mediation must be available to families on their own initiative as a way of resolving internal family disputes. Mediation may also be used in service disputes between families, social workers and caregivers. When such disputes arise, access to mediation must be mandatorily available, but may be voluntarily accepted or refused by the disputing parties. As in other types of dispute resolution mechanisms, families are entitled to an advocate during mediation.

Therefore, we recommend that:

3. Government must make mediation services available to resolve disputes.
4. The results of the Mediation Pilot Project must form the basis for the development and implementation of the government's family and child mediation service with special reference to standards, practices and qualifications of mediators.

Education

Voluntary support can also take the form of education. Contact by family members with individuals, groups and institutions can provide knowledge and skills that are helpful in resolving disputes. Counsellors, networking and self-help groups, as well as formal courses offered by

groups, recreation and community centres, community colleges and universities, may all assist families in resolving disputes.

Learning to resolve disputes is a life-long process. We believe that dispute resolution skills can be learned and that this learning can begin at a very young age. For example, both children and adults can be taught communication skills that could help them to listen to the concerns of others and to explain their own opinions and needs. Role-playing, modelling and group discussions are just a few of the techniques that can give children and adults experience in resolving disputes. We believe that dispute resolution training should be part of the education curriculum at all levels.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 5. The Ministry of Education must include dispute resolution training in its family living curriculum.**

2. Adjudication

Adjudication is a dispute resolution process in which a third party makes a decision after hearing all facts and relevant information concerning a dispute. Decisions are imposed upon all parties and adherence to the decision is mandatory, rather than voluntary. Under the current legislation, all adjudication is done by provincial court judges within the court system. Appeals go to the Supreme Court.

We were told that the unfamiliar and formal environment of the court increases a family's feeling of powerlessness. For example, most judges wear gowns and are seated behind large, raised tables. Also, the language used in the courts is legally precise and demands a level of expertise most family members lack. This means that lawyers must be trusted to interpret what is going on during the hearing. Translation and interpretation of this language for families from non-English speaking cultures is critical. Because the hearings are sometimes public, personal family matters are often exposed and cause families to fear stigmatization. Time delays are often out of the family's control because of scheduling problems.

The atmosphere and structure of the court proceedings also intimidate families. Most members of the public associate courts with criminal trials and consider that any hearing is used to determine wrongdoing or blame. Many judges and lawyers acknowledge that they, too, consider this a problem. The criminal connotation is reinforced by the win/lose adjudications, which are often perceived as innocent/guilty verdicts. The adversarial nature of the court structure

"The justice system has failed . . . It punishes everyone, even younger children."

Foster parent

and hearing format, with their clearly drawn battle lines and strategies, contribute to this sense of vulnerability.

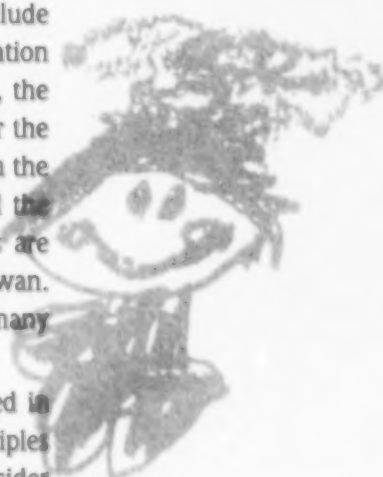
Systemic problems also exist within the court system. Foremost among these problems is the chronic under-valuing of family matters in the court process. Family court hearings must compete with criminal and other cases for court time. The very fact that most courts are multi-purpose means that there is competition for court time. Judges may lack the necessary interest, sensitivity and knowledge to deal appropriately with family disputes. Many families told us that the court system and its judges fail to meet the needs of individual families. Additionally, the mechanisms in place to appoint judges often do not reflect the community and are often culturally insensitive. Judges themselves admit that they are often bound by inflexible legal technicalities.

We have concluded that an alternative to the court system is required in child protection disputes. We believe that administrative tribunals can successfully address these problems in the court system and propose that administrative tribunals replace the current family court system in child protection matters. Appeals from administrative tribunal decisions should be available to the Supreme Court of British Columbia, as is the case for other administrative tribunals in British Columbia.

Administrative tribunals are in use for many different purposes in many jurisdictions. There are approximately 55 agencies in British Columbia that use the process of administrative tribunal. These include the British Columbia Council of Human Rights, the Expropriation Compensation Board, the British Columbia Police Commission, the Industrial Relations Council, and the tribunals established under the *Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act*. Familiar tribunals in the federal government include the Immigration Appeal Board and the Federal Parole Board. For child welfare, community tribunals are currently in use in Scotland and have been legislated in Saskatchewan.

When comparing administrative tribunals to the courts, many advantages have been noted:²

- Proceedings before tribunals are consistently resolved in the public interest, and in accordance with the principles described in legislation; courts, while they may consider public policy, are often bound by legal technicalities and adjudicate in accordance with legal rules. The adversarial court proceedings result in winners and losers.
- Courts are bound by precedent; tribunals are not. This is not to say that the tribunals have no interest in maintaining a pattern of predictable rulings, rather that they are not



bound to follow previous decisions. They have more discretion to consider matters on a case-by-case basis so that decisions reflect current facts.

- Settings for administrative tribunals and the rules governing hearings tend to be more informal than courts.
- Tribunals deal with family cases from beginning to end, whereas courts may never see the parties again once a decision has been reached. Some administrative tribunals have the statutory jurisdiction to review or rehear their own decisions on their own motion, while courts do not have this power.
- Administrative tribunals usually have several members presiding at a hearing. This means that the members reflect community perspectives and bring more expertise to their decisions. In the court system, a single judge presides over the court and must make decisions alone.
- Tribunals can plan for a child's future care and custody needs, while the courts deal only with past events.

"Lay judges who know what it is like to bring up children in poverty would be a good start."

———— Community worker

Taking these differences into account, and having an understanding of the issues and parties in child protection disputes, we believe that an administrative tribunal is a preferable option to the present court system. We would call the administrative tribunal a "community tribunal". A community tribunal is a team of knowledgeable decision-makers who reflect the standards of their community, would adjudicate child protection disputes and impose their decisions upon disputing parties. The community tribunal will have to comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the principles of natural justice and administrative fairness. Administrative fairness encompasses:

- an opportunity for the person affected to be heard before a decision is made (this would include adequate notice of the proposed action, the criteria to be applied and an opportunity to make representations with an advocate);
- unbiased decision-maker(s); and
- adequate and appropriate recourse for decisions given in a timely manner.

Community tribunals will deal with two major child protection matters:

1. child protection decisions and dispositions; and
2. applications for self-custody (further information is available in the chapter *Guardianship: Past and Future*).

Because the powers to adjudicate child protection disputes are currently delegated to the Provincial court under the *Family and Child Service Act*, those powers could be transferred to the community tribunal through new legislation. However, the inherent jurisdiction of the Crown through the Supreme Court over children as *parens patriae* should be retained as currently accomplished through Section 21 of the *Family and Child Service Act*. Safeguards will also need to be established to prevent the adversarial and litigious climate of the court system from being transferred into the community tribunal setting and to ensure the community tribunal's effectiveness, without restricting constitutional rights.

The benefits of a community tribunal are many. It is a dispute resolution mechanism that has the potential to be:

- conducted in a non-adversarial fashion;
- non-criminal in its appearance, language and procedures;
- more private and less intimidating than the courts;
- timely;
- close to and reflective of societal values and norms;
- reflective of specific cultural realities;
- adaptable to changing times and societal norms;
- able to share decision-making responsibilities with communities by virtue of its membership;
- able to advocate for the community and recommend services that are lacking;
- available to communities in different forms, depending on community needs and preferences;
- more knowledgeable in family matters because of the special expertise of its members;
- aware of dispute resolution and family service alternatives; and
- dedicated to a single task and therefore able to follow cases for their complete duration.

We recognize that replacing the family court system with community tribunals for child protection disputes is a radical departure from the existing system. In keeping with the administrative tribunal structure, different forms of community tribunals may be implemented in different parts of the province to take regional geographic realities into consideration. We do not consider that returning to the court system is

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

an option. Rather, any difficulties with community tribunals must be worked out as their implementation progresses.

Therefore, we recommend that:

6. Community tribunals, constituted as administrative tribunals, must be established to replace the court system in all child protection disputes.
7. Legislation must give community tribunals the authority to make decisions for child protection matters and self-custody.
8. Forms of community tribunals must be developed, implemented and evaluated in selected communities within the province and then permanently constituted for all communities throughout the province by 1995.



¹ Multiculturalism: Towards Cultural Competence.

² Robert W. Macaulay, O.C. *Practice and Procedure before Administrative Tribunals*. Carswell, Toronto, 1988.

Dispute Resolution Recommendations

1. The structure of all dispute resolution mechanisms must recognize and respect the special vulnerability of families and be as non-adversarial as possible.
2. The Ministry of Social Services must respect and work with the available natural support network of families to resolve disputes.
3. Government must make mediation services available to resolve disputes.
4. The results of the Mediation Pilot Project must form the basis for the development and implementation of the government's family and child mediation service with special reference to standards, practices and qualifications of mediators.
5. The Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights must include dispute resolution training in its family living curriculum.
6. Community tribunals, constituted as administrative tribunals, must be established to replace the court system in all child protection disputes.
7. Legislation must give community tribunals the authority to make decisions for child protection matters and self-custody.
8. Forms of community tribunals must be developed, implemented and evaluated in selected communities within the province and then permanently constituted for all communities throughout the province by 1995.



Child Protection

"The issue is not whether the government will intervene. It will. The question is whether it will intervene for enhancement and prevention, or whether it will respond to breakdown problems...alone."

ADVOCACY
ORGANIZATION



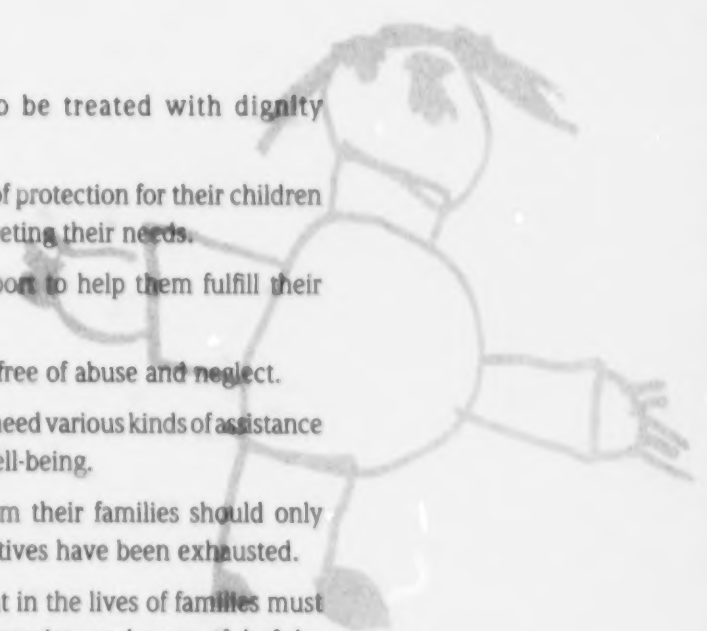


Child Protection

Principles

We believe:

- All people are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Families are the best source of protection for their children and the best resource for meeting their needs.
- Families are entitled to support to help them fulfill their parental responsibilities.
- Children are entitled to live free of abuse and neglect.
- Children are vulnerable, and need various kinds of assistance to ensure their safety and well-being.
- The removal of children from their families should only occur when all other alternatives have been exhausted.
- Child protection involvement in the lives of families must proceed at a pace that is appropriate and respectful of the needs of all family members.



Perspective

Throughout this report, we have stressed the need within the Ministry of Social Services for a philosophy committed to respecting families and giving families the services and supports they need to be successful. The preceding chapters have outlined our vision of how this can be accomplished. It is our hope that the changes proposed in these chapters will help prevent the removal of children from their families. We must, however, face the reality that some families will still reach the point where their children's safety is at stake, and government intervention will be necessary. When this happens, we must be able to act in a humane manner, a manner that recognizes and reduces the trauma and tension involved. Thus the fundamental issue is **how** government will intervene. In our travels throughout the province, this issue was on the minds of virtually everyone with whom we talked.

Families told us they feel threatened and powerless during child protection investigations. They expressed anger at social workers who

"Although we are just another case to the workers who have done what they think is a good job in 'removing our child,' the grief, continual soul searching, and feelings of loss experienced by family members when losing a child to the 'system' demand that changes be made."

Parent

"Through the apprehension process, we make the children the victims again, similar to battered women."

Foster parent

symbolize a system that families feel is not working. Families accused social workers of underestimating their power and failing to recognize that an investigation causes a crisis within the family. Families said that they are at a disadvantage, because only one side knows the rules and holds all the power. They complained that investigations often are not thorough, and that everything seems to happen too quickly. As one person put it, "My kid was apprehended, and they only spent half an hour with me."

Parents, and the public, see child protection workers as "social cops" whose only role is to remove children from their homes. This has generated much fear. This fear is more intense within ethno-cultural communities, where language and cultural barriers amplify the sense of helplessness felt by families. People within these communities feel that social workers do not understand them. They could not understand how someone could come into their homes and take away their children; the concept of removal is totally incomprehensible to them.

Wide-ranging viewpoints came from children and youth; we heard everything from, "I would have been better off if you'd done nothing at all," to "Why did you wait so long?" In many cases, children acknowledged the need for help, but were highly critical of the action that had been taken. They wanted to know why an offender wasn't removed from the family, rather than the children, and complained about the lack of help for their families.

Social workers talked about feeling "out on a limb". Many felt inadequately trained and supported for the magnitude of the decisions they have to make. They talked about their workloads being too heavy, and about expending too much energy recording information to "cover" themselves. They said they are frustrated with how the focus of their work has become investigative, rather than supportive. As one staff member put it, "Put the social back in social work, please."

Caregivers told us how difficult it is to deal with the consequences of sudden child removal. They face angry, confused parents and traumatized children who do not understand why they have been taken away from their families. They feel they are given little if any information to help them cope with this trauma.

We heard repeatedly that the Ministry has become too isolated from the community. Teachers, doctors, grandparents and caregivers expressed the desire to be respected as part of a support network for children and families in crisis; social workers told us they want and need to work more collaboratively with the community members.

What we heard loud and clear was a lack of confidence in the child protection system. We believe confidence must be restored, and that it can be.



Issues

The current *Family and Child Service Act* was introduced and applied against a backdrop of tremendous societal pressure. Government cutbacks during the economic recession of the early 1980s reduced the services the Ministry of Social Services could provide. At the same time, the demand for services increased; as the public became more knowledgeable, there was an explosion of sexual abuse disclosures from individuals and from primary institutions. Concerns about personal liability increased, and there was a shift from communal values to a focus on individual rights. We believe these factors have greatly influenced how child protection practices have evolved over the years. Child protection has come to be viewed as the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Social Services. The investigative approach that the Ministry has adopted has alienated the community.

Child protection is a highly specialized field of social work. This must be recognized and valued, both within government and within the community. It must be recognized that caring for children is everybody's responsibility. Furthermore, we need a social climate that values family and community.

1. Definitions and language

1.1 Abuse and neglect

Throughout our travels, there were constant debates about the level of definition required in the new Act. Of particular concern were the terms "abuse" and "neglect". Many people called for specific, detailed definitions that leave as little room as possible for inconsistent interpretation. Others argued that overly detailed definitions can create as many problems as they solve, because making them too narrow and legalistic can prevent appropriate child protection action from being taken.

There was considerable confusion about what constitutes physical abuse. The issue of spanking came up repeatedly. Some people argued that applying any physical force constitutes child abuse. At the other end of the spectrum were those who maintain that parents have the right to apply as much force as it takes to discipline their children, as long as it doesn't leave marks. Many people suggested that the new legislation include clear guidelines on when a spanking turns into a beating. Ethno-cultural communities were also concerned about interpretation of physical abuse; they pointed out that child-rearing practices vary from culture to culture, and cautioned us on the danger of concluding abuse without considering the total context.

Emotional abuse was a major concern. Numerous people said

"I have fear that my responsibility as a parent may at some time be stripped."

Parent

there was a need to clearly define emotional abuse in the legislation, pointing to the vagueness of the term "safety and well-being". Many stated that the witnessing of family violence should be considered a form of emotional abuse.

Some people told us that children's non-attendance at school constitutes a specific form of neglect on the part of the parents. Others talked to us about the benefits of home schooling. A growing number of parents are disillusioned with the school system and do not want to send their children to school. These parents believe that they should have the right to determine how their children will be educated without fearing charges of neglect. We believe that both of these issues must be dealt with by the Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 1. The Ministry of Education must take primary responsibility for dealing with issues concerning school attendance.**

We have come to understand that providing clear definitions is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Furthermore, providing precise and therefore limited definitions may do a disservice to families and children, rather than helping them get the services they need and want.

We have considered whether definitions should be general or specific, whether we should attempt to provide precise definitions or general characteristics, and whether definitions should be contained in the new Act, in the regulations, in policy and procedures manuals, and elsewhere. We have come to the following conclusions:

- In all situations where children and youth are judged to be "In need of services", they have suffered **harm**, and/or there has been the use/abuse of **power**, and/or there has been **exploitation**.
- Abuse is almost always a combination of physical, sexual and emotional actions. Therefore, we believe that these actions must be considered together, and that definitions must reflect this.
- In defining neglect, we need to differentiate between systemic neglect and parental/caregiver neglect. Systemic neglect occurs when the government fails, for example, to provide adequate housing, adequate levels of income support, adequate schooling or adequate wage levels. Parental/



MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

caregiver neglect assumes that the parents or caregivers have the material resources to provide adequate minimal care, and are failing to do so.

- There are no single, valid definitions of physical, sexual and emotional abuse or neglect. Rather, each definition must take into account the specific use to which it will be put, the age group to which it will be applied, and current community standards.

Therefore, we recommend that:

2. The creation of specific definitions of abuse and neglect must always reflect the characteristics of harm, abuse of power and exploitation.
3. Any definitions created must acknowledge the fact that physical, sexual and emotional abuse usually occur in combination.
4. In any definition of neglect, systemic neglect and parental/caregiver neglect must be differentiated.
5. The creation of definitions must start with a clear statement of their purpose and intent, and that definitions be age-related and respectful of community standards.

1.2 Language

The use of adversarial, criminalizing language within the current *Family and Child Service Act* has been highly criticized. We have identified several terms we wish to eliminate from the legislation.

The first is "apprehension", which has strong criminal connotations. Our conclusion is supported by the work of the Minister's Staff Advisory Committee on Multiculturalism, which, in its September 1992 report, pointed out that the words "apprehend" and "apprehension" can only be translated into other languages as "capture" or "arrest". We believe "remove" and "removal" are less blaming and more straightforward.

"Investigation" also has strong criminal connotations. Furthermore, it sets the tone for the work of Ministry of Social Services staff. We believe that a more appropriate term would be "inquiry".

The term "in need of protection" has come to be synonymous with a need for removal. We propose that it be replaced with "in need of mandatory service". We consider this phrase less blaming, and, while it specifies that action must be taken, it does not suggest that removal is the only action possible.

"Even the word 'apprehend' is criminal."

Social worker

Therefore, we recommend that:

6. The new legislation must use the following terms:

- "remove" and "removal" in place of "apprehend" and "apprehension";
- "inquiry" in place of "investigation"; and
- "in need of mandatory service" in place of "in need of protection".

2. Family violence

There is growing recognition that being exposed to family violence has a far greater impact on children than has been perceived in the past. There is evidence that children who witness abuse suffer many of the same psychological problems as children who are direct victims of it. Recently, federal and provincial studies have begun to address this issue. The Provincial Task Force on Family Violence examined the problem in its report *Is Anyone Listening?*

Many people proposed that witnessing abuse be considered a form of emotional abuse. They also recommended that this issue be dealt with in the new legislation. Furthermore, they called for more counselling and other services for these children and their families, and strongly recommended that the offending family member, not the child, be removed from the home.

We agree that the implications of family violence are serious. We are also aware that concerns about children's safety must be dealt with in a manner that does not further victimize children and non-abusing family members. It must be recognized that many factors contribute to family violence; one of the most significant is poverty. Many women who are battered by their partners simply do not have the money or the necessary supports to get out of these situations.

A variety of resources and services must be available to these families. More funding is needed for transition houses and support groups for battered women. Non-abusing family members must have the legal ability to remove the offender from the home, and must receive whatever supports are necessary to ensure that they and their children will be safe.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 7. The new legislation must include provision for removing the offender in all situations of abuse.**

"The apprehension should be of the guilty party and not the innocent child."

Parent

8. There must be increased support, both within the home and within community programs, for children and family members who are victims of abuse.

3. Responding to calls

3.1 Types of calls

Social workers from the Ministry of Social Services generally receive three types of calls: calls from parents or children requesting some form of family support or help for themselves; calls from neighbours, friends or professionals expressing concern about a family and requesting help for them; and calls from children, parents, friends or professionals who suspect or believe that a child is being abused or neglected. The responses to each type of call differ significantly.

There was generally agreement that calls from families requesting support services do not receive priority. Social workers told us they do not have the time to offer direct counselling services to families, even though they often would like to. Some said they were not sure they had permission to do it, as their mandate in this area is unclear. Others felt that they lack the skills to do it.

The response to families is also limited by waiting lists for appropriate services and, in some cases, services being entirely unavailable. Social workers must manage their workloads within a structure that demands that child protection investigations come first. This has been frustrating for many families. The following case is an example of a common problem.

A mother called for help and was told she would have to wait a couple of weeks for an appointment. In the meantime, a neighbour called and said she thought the mother was abusing her 14-year-old daughter. This mother received services, but only after a child protection investigation, not as a response to her own request for help.

We believe that requests from families must be given priority in the system, so that their needs are met before crises are reached. Parents know themselves and their children better than anyone else does, and are in the best position to say when they need help.

Calls from teachers, friends, community members and others are often requests for help on behalf of families. In many situations, an incident of abuse or neglect has not occurred, but the caller believes the family should be offered or have access to a support service. Social workers often encourage these callers to have the families request help directly, but in many cases families are afraid to get involved in the child welfare system. The effectiveness of this strategy is also questionable,



"More weight is given to the report of a third party than is given to the parent asking for help."

————— *Grandmother*

considering the low priority given to calls from families requesting support services. The option that does not exist for the social worker is to offer help directly to the family. We believe that reaching out to families should be a primary function of the social worker. Although some may argue that this is intrusive, we maintain that providing a more helpful and supportive service will keep families and children together and safe.

While it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Services to determine which reports require an inquiry, we believe the initial assessment must be done in consultation with the reporter, as the reporter knows far more about the family than does the social worker. In many instances, reporters have a significant relationship with the family. They may be family members or professionals within the community who have an ongoing relationship with the family. Many professionals have expertise in the area of child abuse and are aware of the dynamics of family violence. Social workers must be given the authority and the permission to consult with reporters and develop strategies to come up with the most appropriate actions. We do not wish to jeopardize children's safety in any way, but at the same time we must legitimize the significant role that others can play in helping children and families.

Although child protection inquiries will always be intrusive to family life, we believe that a more cooperative community approach will make a difference. We also believe that the offering of help and support must go hand-in-hand with fact-finding during inquiries.

Therefore, we recommend that:

9. When calls from the community are received, there must be legislation enabling the social worker to make one of three decisions: no further involvement; begin a child protection inquiry; or offer a family service, either directly or in collaboration with the community.

4. Worker competency and training

The initial assessment of a report of abuse or neglect requires a high level of skill, experience and cultural competence. This kind of decision-making cannot be done by entry-level, unskilled workers who lack experience and training. The problem has been identified this way: "Imagine a 911 system that cannot distinguish between life-threatening crimes and littering."¹

Skill, experience, judgement and, especially, common sense are crucial to a good inquiry. Most of the complaints we heard about the

current process centred on the following issue: people said they often are not told the reasons for investigations, and that investigations are conducted too quickly and without consideration of the context of a person's life. These complaints were particularly evident in ethno-cultural communities, where language barriers and cultural differences make it more difficult for people to deal with the trauma that a child protection inquiry causes. The issue of worker maturity came up time and time again; families were critical of workers who lacked the expertise and experience to understand their family situations.

All of these concerns underscore the need to assign the most highly skilled social workers, with the most expertise, experience and cultural competence, to child protection work. We believe that, whenever possible, the same worker who deals with the initial assessment should conduct the inquiry. When this is not possible, the inquiry can be delegated only to a worker with the necessary level of skill and competence.

"Once an allegation has been made, intervention should be neutral, thoughtful, and, above all, skilled."

Physician

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 10. Criteria must be developed to assess social workers' skill and competence in the area of child protection. Receiving delegated authority to conduct an inquiry must be dependent upon meeting these skill and competence criteria.**
- 11. Child protection inquiries must be conducted in a culturally appropriate/sensitive manner and in the language preferred by the family.**
- 12. Government must provide the appropriate communication assistance to all families involved in a child protection inquiry.**

5. The place of standards

A tremendous amount of work has been undertaken recently to develop child and youth protection standards and procedures within the Ministry of Social Services. We believe, however, that these standards need to be reviewed and reworked in light of the philosophy and principles outlined in this report. It bears noting that the mark of a good standard is that it is simple and easily put into practice.

While standards must be clear, they are only as good as the competency of the people applying them. The proponents of standards all acknowledge that they are but a framework that guides the work. The more skilled and experienced workers are, the simpler and more general the standards can be.

We also believe that when social workers are well connected to the community, their approach to dealing with families will be different. It is important that social workers know the families in their communities, and that the communities know and respect them. This is one of the reasons we are recommending in the chapter *Service Delivery* that child and youth protection services be integrated with family support services in locally based offices.

Therefore, we recommend that:

13. The Ministry of Social Services must develop standards, policies and procedures that reflect and respect the principles of this report.

6. Obligation to offer services

While we applaud the recent initiatives on the part of the Ministry of Social Services to enhance family support programs, we must acknowledge that the lack of support services for children in their own homes has resulted in the removal of many children.

Services to support children in their own families have not been a priority. The focus has been on programs for children in care, rather than on services to keep families and children together and safe. This has often meant that children need "in care" status to get help. One young woman, for example, pointed out that the foster parents of her special needs child were getting \$1500 a month to care for the child, while the welfare money she received to look after herself and her other two children was only \$1200.

Many children and youth in care stressed that support services for their families should have been available prior to their removal. One of the recurring comments we heard was, "They should have done something — my parents needed help."

We believe that child protection workers have an obligation to offer support services to families considered at risk, and that the state has the obligation to ensure that those services are available.

Again, it must be stressed that it takes an extremely skilled social worker to offer help while conducting an inquiry. The family must be treated objectively, in an honest and respectful manner.

**"Intervention with families
should empower them with a
sense of hope."**

*Community
service provider*

Therefore, we recommend that:

14. In cases where it has been determined that a child is at risk and some form of intervention is required, social workers must be obligated to assess and offer all appropriate support services they deem necessary to keep the family together and free from harm, and that the Ministry of Social Services be obligated to ensure that those services are available.

7. Family conferences and involved persons meeting

When there are concerns about a child's safety, all alternatives to removal must be explored. Recognizing that children and their families are often in the best position to make decisions about their lives, we believe they should be involved in this process. We propose that we do this through **family conferences**.

A family conference brings together significant **people in the** child's and the family's life for the purpose of developing a **plan that will** ensure the child's safety. It is an opportunity for the family, with the assistance of the people in their natural support networks, to come up with alternatives themselves, without having decisions imposed on them. The family decides who will attend, drawing on extended **family** members, friends, people within the community, and anyone **else they** believe would be a support. We must ensure that the child's wishes are heard and respected throughout this process.

We must stress that the family conference is a planning process, not a professional "case conference". It is not a group of "professionals" telling families what to do, but a group of family members and others deciding how they are able to help and support the child and family.

We believe that a coordinator employed by government should be provided to organize and facilitate these conferences. This person must be independent from the day-to-day management of the case. Although we cannot prescribe all the procedures this would involve, we think it is important to clarify our reasons for proposing an independent coordinator. Organizing a conference will take time and effort. Families, therefore, cannot be expected to accomplish this task on their own. Help in organizing and facilitating the meeting should not come from the social worker, however, as the power imbalance that exists between family and social worker could undermine the conference. Also, the purpose of the conference is not to debate who is right or wrong, but to plan strategies that will address the issue of the child's safety. This point must be made clear to all parties involved, and doing

**"Government as solution
has to be replaced by family
as solution."**

————— Mental health worker

so may not be an easy task. An independent coordinator would have the skills necessary to ensure that all participants understand the conference's purpose and the roles they will play. The coordinator must also be given the resources necessary to ensure that those people the child and the family consider significant are able to attend, regardless of where they live.

The concept of family conferences is not new. They have been used traditionally in other cultures, and are currently being used informally in a number of communities in British Columbia. Their strengths are the respect they show to families, and their acknowledgement that there are many significant people in a child's life.

Family group conferences were introduced in New Zealand in 1989. An approach based on the New Zealand model is currently being experimented with in Nova Scotia. A review of the New Zealand model has indicated that children are now more likely to be cared for within their families, and that fewer are going into residential care.

We are aware that some families will choose not to organize a family conference. While this choice will be respected, we believe it should then be the social worker's responsibility to organize an **involved persons meeting**. The concept is virtually the same, except that in this case the social worker will determine who should attend. Efforts will still be made to involve the family and the child.

While both types of meetings can happen at any point during the inquiry, we believe that one or the other must occur before any non-emergency child protection matter is adjudicated. The only circumstances in which a conference would be considered inappropriate are those in which the conference has the potential to jeopardize the safety of the child or other family members.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 15. Family conferences/involved persons meetings must be available at any stage of a child protection inquiry.**
- 16. An independent coordinator must be charged with overseeing and facilitating these meetings.**
- 17. Before a request for a non-emergency removal is made, a family conference or involved persons meeting must have taken place.**

8. Adjudications

No single issue evoked more emotion from families than the fact that children are removed from their homes before hearings have taken

place. Most people agree that in emergencies, removals must be immediate. These are defined as situations that expose children to extreme, imminent harm or life-threatening circumstances. In non-emergency situations, we do not believe that immediate removal is required. As it stands, firm plans for the child's future care are not in place before removal occurs. As well, lengthy delays in the courts often leave children and their families in limbo while the matter is being settled.

Many people told us that some kind of warrant should be required for non-emergency removals, but there was no consensus on the kind of warrant it should be or how it should be used. We believe there is a better way to address the current problems.

We are recommending a different procedure for adjudicating child protection matters. First, in all but emergency situations, we are proposing that child protection matters be adjudicated before removal can occur. Second, we propose that a community tribunal, with legislated authority to function as an administrative tribunal, replace the court system. (See the chapter *Dispute Resolution* for more information.)

9. Emergency removals

In emergency situations, where removal occurs immediately, the social worker will bring the matter before the community tribunal within 24 hours of removing the child. The tribunal will make a same-day decision as to whether the removal was warranted or not. If removal was warranted, the community tribunal must approve a short-term plan for the child's care and set a date for a full hearing, which must commence within 14 days of the first hearing.

10. Non-emergency removals

In non-emergency situations, the social worker will bring the matter before the community tribunal for an initial hearing to determine whether further intervention is required. Within 24 hours, the community tribunal will determine whether the child can remain in the home until a full hearing is completed, or if the child needs to be removed. Again, a full hearing must commence within 14 days.

Whenever the community tribunal determines that removal or ongoing involvement is necessary, it must hear from all parties and approve a full plan for the child's care, including such details as time frames, review dates and the responsibilities of all parties. It is understood that, whenever possible, the community tribunal members will remain the same throughout the time period in which the case is heard.

The plan approved by the community tribunal must meet the legal test of being the "least detrimental alternative" for the child. The

"Often the family knows things are not going well but needs to hear this in terms they can afford to 'hear' rather than from a perspective and a position of power."

Ministry staff

concept of "least detrimental alternative" recognizes that all intervention is disruptive and upsetting to the child. It involves first conceptualizing the best possible plan for addressing a child's developmental needs, and then considering alternatives in terms of their distance from this ideal. It must also take into account the probable long-term consequences of **not** intervening.

Because circumstances change (sometimes rapidly and dramatically) all plans must be subject to immediate review. A review may be initiated by any party, including the child. We propose that the community tribunal be charged with the responsibility of ensuring that children do not "drift" within the social services system. Therefore, plans should be reviewed twice a year, with dates being set according to the child's needs.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 18.** The new legislation must define emergencies as situations that expose a child to extreme or imminent harm, or life-threatening circumstances.
- 19.** In all but emergency situations, child protection matters must be adjudicated before removal can occur.
- 20.** In emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal within 24 hours of removing the child. The tribunal must make a same-day (no adjournments allowed) decision as to whether the removal was warranted or not.
- 21.** If the removal was warranted, the tribunal must approve a short-term plan for the child's care pending a full hearing, which must commence within 14 days.
- 22.** In non-emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal for an initial hearing to determine whether further intervention is required. Within 24 hours, the community tribunal must decide whether the child can remain in the home until a full hearing is completed, or if the child needs to be removed. A full hearing must commence within 14 days.
- 23.** Whenever removal and/or ongoing involvement is deemed necessary, a full plan must be developed that meets the legal test of being the "least detrimental alternative" for the child.

24. All plans must be subject to immediate reviews by the community tribunal, which may be initiated by any involved party, including the child.
25. The community tribunal must be responsible for ensuring that children do not "drift" within the social services system. Therefore, reviews must be conducted twice a year, with dates being set according to the child's needs.

11. Out-of-home abuse

We heard many concerns about the abuse of children and youth that occurs outside the family home. Abuse occurs within public institutions such as day care centres and schools, and by persons in positions of trust within the community.

Because many of these situations are criminal matters, a number of players are involved, including the police and other ministries. The Ministry of Social Services has tended to focus its efforts on assisting in investigations, rather than on supporting the families involved. **We believe the focus must shift from investigation to support.**

Exploitation and abuse of young people on the street has become alarmingly common. We heard many stories of children being used to commit crimes. Child prostitution is a major issue. Children are being bought and sold on the street. Disease and drug abuse are killing them. Sadly, the sex trade is not limited to the streets.

This exploitation of children must be stopped. Child prostitution is an extreme form of child abuse, and must be recognized and dealt with as such. While we acknowledge that this is a particularly complex issue, we believe that children cannot remain in these abusive situations. The criminal justice system must deal with the abusers by enforcing existing legislation. The Ministry of Social Services must provide support to these children and their families.

Therefore, we recommend that:

26. The Ministry of Attorney General must make every effort possible to ensure that all laws dealing with child exploitation are enforced.
27. The Ministry of Social Services must take responsibility for providing support and protection to children exposed to all forms of out-of-home abuse.

12. Obligation to report

The current *Family and Child Service Act* states that individuals who have reason to believe that a child is being abused or neglected are obliged to report to the Ministry of Social Services. We heard many concerns about this obligation. We believe the crux of the issue is the **response** to calls from the community.

Many people told us that the duty to report should apply only when it is known for certain that abuse or neglect is occurring, not when it is suspected. They said that anonymous calls should not be accepted and that malicious reporters should be liable.

Other people said they did not feel they should have to report because the abuse that occurs within the social services system is sometimes worse than the abuse occurring within the home.

While failure to report is considered an offence in the current legislation, this section of the Act has not been enforced. Many people criticized this lack of enforcement, particularly as it applies to the medical community.

We have considered whether failure to report a known or suspected case of child abuse should be an offence. We seriously question whether enforcing a failure to report would facilitate more open communication or a more effective child protection response. We believe that community members and professionals would prefer more consultation with social workers, with the goal of providing better service to families and children. We feel that the intent of the legislation is to convey a message about the moral responsibility of reporting. We do believe, however, that the Ministry of Social Services can take measures to ensure that both the general public and the professional community are made aware of their moral and ethical responsibility to report.

Therefore, we recommend that:

28. The new legislation must contain the following provisions:

- All people have the responsibility to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.
- The privacy of the reporter will be maintained wherever possible.
- People who make reports in good faith will not be personally liable.

29. A training package on family violence and child abuse and neglect issues must be developed for community groups and professionals. Staff of the Ministry of Social Services should offer this program on a comprehensive basis throughout the province.
30. The Ministry of Social Services must work with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the Ministry of Education to ensure that family violence and child abuse and neglect issues become part of the university and college curricula for all related professions.
31. The Ministry of Social Services must work with professional organizations such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons to ensure that the responsibility to report becomes part of the ethical code of conduct and practice.



The Future of Child Protective Services: Contending with Overblown Expectations,
by Douglas Besharov, in *Public Welfare*, Winter, 1987.

Child Protection Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education must take primary responsibility for dealing with issues concerning school attendance.
2. The creation of specific definitions of abuse and neglect must always reflect the characteristics of harm, abuse of power and exploitation.
3. Any definitions created must acknowledge the fact that physical, sexual and emotional abuse usually occur in combination.
4. In any definition of neglect, systemic neglect and parental/caregiver neglect must be differentiated.
5. The creation of definitions must start with a clear statement of their purpose and intent, and that definitions be age-related and respectful of community standards.
6. The new legislation must use the following terms:
 - "remove" and "removal" in place of "apprehend" and "apprehension";
 - "inquiry" in place of "investigation"; and
 - "in need of mandatory service" in place of "in need of protection".
7. The new legislation must include provision for removing the offender in all situations of abuse.
8. There must be increased support, both within the home and within community programs, for children and family members who are victims of abuse.
9. When calls from the community are received, there must be legislation enabling the social worker to make one of three decisions: no further involvement; begin a child protection inquiry; or offer a family service, either directly or in collaboration with the community.
10. Criteria must be developed to assess social workers' skill and competence in the area of child protection. Receiving delegated authority to conduct an inquiry must be dependent upon meeting these skill and competence criteria.

11. Child protection inquiries must be conducted in a culturally appropriate/sensitive manner and in the language preferred by the family.
12. Government must provide the appropriate communication assistance to all families involved in a child protection inquiry.
13. The Ministry of Social Services must develop standards, policies and procedures that reflect and respect the principles of this report.
14. In cases where it has been determined that a child is at risk and some form of intervention is required, social workers must be obligated to assess and offer all appropriate support services they deem necessary to keep the family together and free from harm, and that the Ministry of Social Services be obligated to ensure that those services are available.
15. Family conferences/involved persons meetings must be available at any stage of a child protection inquiry.
16. An independent coordinator must be charged with overseeing and facilitating these meetings.
17. Before a request for a non-emergency removal is made, a family conference or involved persons meeting must have taken place.
18. The new legislation must define emergencies as situations that expose a child to extreme or imminent harm, or life-threatening circumstances.
19. In all but emergency situations, child protection matters must be adjudicated before removal can occur.
20. In emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal within 24 hours of removing the child. The tribunal must make a same-day (no adjournments allowed) decision as to whether the removal was warranted or not.
21. If the removal was warranted, the tribunal must approve a short-term plan for the child's care pending a full hearing, which must commence within 14 days.

22. In non-emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal for an initial hearing to determine whether further intervention is required. Within 24 hours, the community tribunal must decide whether the child can remain in the home until a full hearing is completed, or if the child needs to be removed. A full hearing must commence within 14 days.
23. Whenever removal and/or ongoing involvement is deemed necessary, a full plan must be developed that meets the legal test of being the "least detrimental alternative" for the child.
24. All plans must be subject to immediate reviews by the community tribunal, which may be initiated by any involved party, including the child.
25. The community tribunal must be responsible for ensuring that children do not "drift" within the social services system. Therefore, reviews must be conducted twice a year, with dates being set according to the child's needs.
26. The Ministry of Attorney General must make every effort possible to ensure that all laws dealing with child exploitation are enforced.
27. The Ministry of Social Services must take responsibility for providing support and protection to children exposed to all forms of out-of-home abuse.
28. The new legislation must contain the following provisions:
 - All people have the responsibility to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.
 - The privacy of the reporter will be maintained wherever possible.
 - People who make reports in good faith will not be personally liable.
29. A training package on family violence and child abuse and neglect issues must be developed for community groups and professionals. Staff of the Ministry of Social Services should offer this program on a comprehensive basis throughout the province.

- 30.** The Ministry of Social Services must work with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the Ministry of Education to ensure that family violence and child abuse and neglect issues become part of the university and college curricula for all related professions.
- 31.** The Ministry of Social Services must work with professional organizations such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons to ensure that the responsibility to report becomes part of the ethical code of conduct and practice.



Alternative Care

"We all want to help kids heal and grow. Can we not do it as a large extended family; with continuity and consistency and hope instead of like a group of adults who don't know each others' names, trying to manoeuvre a larger group of kids through a maze that's supposed to be their life?"

FOSTER PARENT





Alternative Care

Principles

We believe:

- Existing family and community networks are the preferred sources of alternative care for children.
- Stability and continuity in living arrangements are fundamental to healthy development.
- Children and youth are entitled to living arrangements that are safe, meet their developmental needs, take into account any disabilities or special needs, and respect their cultural heritage.
- Families must be involved to the maximum extent possible in decisions affecting where and how their children should live.
- Children must be consulted before decisions are made regarding alternative living arrangements, in keeping with their development and decision making ability.
- Children are entitled to their personal history; social workers, caregivers and service providers must safeguard all information that provides this history.

"If you're going to take me from my home, you'd better be damn sure you're going to put me some place better."

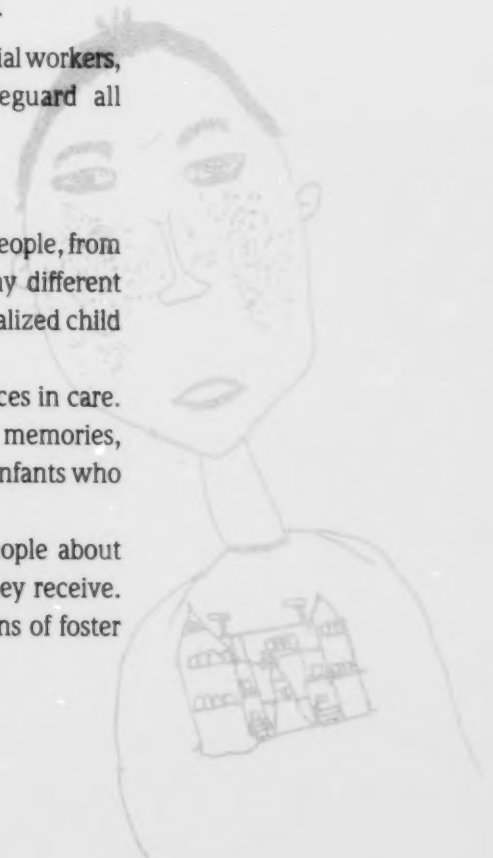
————— *Youth in care*

Perspective

At any given time in this province, about 6000 young people, from infants to teenagers, are "in care". The term covers many different arrangements such as foster homes, group homes and specialized child care resources.

Many young people spoke to us about their experiences in care. We are especially grateful to those who shared their early memories, and thus helped us keep in mind the younger children and infants who could not directly tell us their stories.

The panel heard two clear messages from young people about alternative care. First, they want continuity in the care they receive. Some of those who spoke to us had been in literally dozens of foster



homes or group living arrangements; most had experienced the frustration resulting from the change of social workers and caregivers. Some had left the care system at the age of 19 feeling that they came from nowhere, belonged to no one, and had no personal history other than a few disjointed files in some distant office.

Second, some said that their experience of alternative care was like going "from the frying pan into the fire." In other words, they had been taken from an abusive situation at home, only to land in another abusive situation — but among people they didn't know and with whom they had little in common. The panel has no information on how often this happens, and we are aware that people unhappy with the system are more likely to speak at a community consultation than those who are satisfied with it. Nonetheless, we believe that young people are often moved into alternative care that is little better — and sometimes worse — than the situation from which they came.

Parents, social workers and caregivers all had serious complaints about alternative care, but each group had a different perspective.

From parents, we repeatedly heard the complaint that while alternative caregivers were given a great deal of support and services for each child in care, these same resources were not available to their families. They said that government seemed ready to provide things like ballet lessons, hockey gear and Christmas presents while a child was in care, but would not help them when there wasn't enough to eat in their home.

Parents also said that they were shut out from decision-making about where and how their children lived in alternative care, with unhappy consequences when the children were returned. A poignant example came from an Indo-Canadian parent. Teenage dating runs totally counter to the values of their community, said the parent, yet his 16-year-old daughter was permitted to date boys of her age while in a foster home. This led to fierce tension in the family when the girl returned home, determined to continue the dating she had become used to while in alternative care.

From the social worker's perspective, the major problems are the lack of placement options, the lack of flexibility when trying to keep young people in their family or community networks, and the lack of time to remedy the previous two problems. Many expressed dismay at the number of times children are moved while in care, and frustration at their inability to prevent it.

Part of the problem, they said, is that lack of options makes it difficult to match each child with a caregiver who is truly well suited to that child's particular needs. As more than one social worker told us,

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

it is a "luxury" to have more than one placement to choose from when a young person has to be moved.

Current resource levels are further strained by the increasing number of children in alternative care who have special needs and disabilities. Here too, social workers often have few options when seeking a bed for an infant with symptoms of fetal alcohol syndrome, or a home for a teenager with a severe learning disability.

Caregivers gave us yet another perspective. They said that they had three major problems. One was lack of information about the children coming into their home. The second was that the needs of young people placed with them are often far beyond what they expected when they agreed to become caregivers. The third was the problem of matching; they often have to take in children who do not fit with the other children already in their home, or with the environment they are trying to create.

Finally, contractors commented on the lack of consistency among the three ministries that place young people in alternative care. Inconsistent standards between the Ministry of Attorney General, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Services can lead to situations that would be humorous if they did not affect real lives. For example, we heard about a receiving home that houses young people from two different ministries. One day everyone went out on a canoe trip. When they arrived at a set of rapids, only part of the group kept on paddling and shot the white water. The others had to make a portage because "their" ministry's regulations specifically listed rapids as dangerous situations that their caregivers were supposed to avoid.

In almost every meeting we had with young people, staff and caregivers, the issue was raised of what happens to young people after they leave the Ministry's care. As well, many young people told us that they were scared of being abandoned by the alternative care system at the age of 19, just at a time when some of them are starting to "get it together". It felt, they said, like getting the rug pulled out from under them — a cruel present on their 19th birthday.

To conclude this overview of perspectives, we return to what we heard from the young people. We met with a group representing the Youth In Care Network, an organization of young people from across Canada. They reminded us that foster parents, residential staff and other caregivers also need support such as training, "time out" and counselling — in effect, care for those who provide alternative care. This insightful and responsible position buttresses our belief that young people have a valuable role to play in making decisions about the services government creates to look after them.

"No one else would say yes, we were asked to expand our range of who we would accept."

Foster parent



Issues

In the following issues, we use alternative care to mean any arrangement made by government that places or supports young people outside their families. The one exception is placements in correctional institutions, which we deal with in the chapter *Youth Services*.

1. Continuity and stability

The panel was moved to hear from young people who had been "bounced" from home to home so many times that they hardly remembered them all.

This issue is fundamental. Children of all ages **need** attachments to people and places, yet current child protection systems fail to provide the continuity, stability and finally the love that permits and nurtures these attachments. We are convinced that government can and must do better.

Continuity and stability are crucial in four areas:

1. Continuity in family relationships: This is of primary importance even when the child does not reside with the family. Maximum efforts should be made to maintain children within their family and community networks. If this is not possible, the same effort should go into maintaining connections with and involvement by immediate and/or extended family.
2. Continuity in residence and caregivers: We all need a sense of place, security and belonging. Whenever possible, government should attempt to support children **where they live** rather than move them somewhere else.

Government services sometimes contain a "Catch-22" that works like this: a 12-year-old girl is moved to a new residence because she has severe behavioural problems; after months of getting used to her new residence and gaining trust in her caregivers, she begins to make progress; because she is making progress and her behaviour is less disruptive, she is moved to a new residence in order to make room for another child with severe behavioural problems. She has to begin again...

Sometimes children in alternative care form bonds with other children in the same location, children who may be the closest thing to brothers and sisters they will ever have. There is currently no recognition of the importance of these attachments. Nor is there any formal mechanism for these young people to keep track of each other once they are separated or leave alternative care.

"... only after phoning the supervisor ... (could we) arrange for the child to attend a family gathering."

Family member

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

3. **Continuity in social workers:** The social worker is one of the most important people in the life of young people in care, both as a decision-maker and as a link with the young person's past. Unfortunately, social workers move on to new cases or locations for many reasons, and frequently their caseload does not permit them time for continuity unless there is some sort of crisis. Some young people told us that they had lost count of the times they'd had to "spill their guts" (tell their most intimate thoughts and hopes) to a new social worker.

We know that many social workers maintain informal contact with children who have long since left care; we believe a formal mechanism should be established to help social workers (as well as caregivers) stay in touch and lend a hand when necessary. This may include resources for travel and consultation.

4. **Continuity in personal history:** We all need roots, but sometimes all that children in care have are photos, letters and other mementos of times past and people they hardly know. These mementos get lost, and sometimes children destroy them in moments of frustration. And, as caregivers told us, some children arrive at their home with nothing of their own except a green garbage bag containing some clothes.

Government and those who provide care must honour and help preserve each individual's personal history, not only by safeguarding mementos but by careful record keeping. Even if all that remains of a child's past is a paper trail of case files, this evidence of a personal past must be kept safe for the day when the child wishes to consult it.

We can envision different forms of preserving each child's past that permit both creativity and cultural sensitivity. For some, it might be a photo album; for others the equivalent of a "hope chest". Whatever they enter care with, it must be guaranteed that children will leave with much, much more than a "green garbage bag" as their link to their past.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. **Continuity and stability of care must be adopted both as a goal and as a guiding principle in alternative care. This should include continuity and stability in family relationships, in residence and caregivers, and in social workers.**
2. **Mechanisms must be created to allow young people who have been in care together to keep track of each other once they are separated or leave alternative care.**

"Some of the worst tragedies of our work with children have been a result of lack of contact."

Social worker

3. Mechanisms must be created to help social workers and caregivers to stay in touch with the young people who have been their responsibilities.
4. Efforts and resources must be made available to collect and preserve the personal history of each young person in care.

2. Expanding the Alternatives

Our consultations convinced us that the families and young people of this province need more options for alternative care. The current options are inadequate because:

- they do not emphasize continuation of existing family and community ties while young people are in care;
- they do not actively seek the help of families and young people in planning, choosing and taking some degree of responsibility for the alternative care that best suits them;
- they do not recognize the value of family and community networks, which are a rich and largely untapped source of alternative care options; and
- they are not flexible enough to permit arrangements that, though acceptable to all parties (young person, family, potential caregiver and social worker) may not meet government's institutional standards.

This last point is perhaps best illustrated by a real-life example. We were told of a 19-year-old former youth in care who lived on his own, receiving income assistance while he attended school. One day his 14-year-old sister showed up and asked if she could live with him; she too had left home and had lived on the streets for months. A social worker reviewed the case and supported the arrangement, especially since the sister declared she would live on the street again rather than go to a foster home. Unfortunately, the 19-year-old did not qualify as an "approved child care resource" for his sister under the relevant regulations, even after their mother gave her written consent.

We were told that the story ended happily, but only because some rules were "bent a little". The point is this: **the rules needed to be flexible and respond to the individual needs of children and youth.**

Currently, there are only three somewhat more flexible options available before young people are removed from their existing situation and put into the formalized system of foster homes, group homes and

"The question that we linger with as foster parents is why so many children are taken out of their natural homes because of a short-term crisis . . ."

_____ Foster parent

other child care resources. These are the *Child in the Home of Relative Program*, *Restricted Foster Homes* and *Underage Income Assistance*.

We believe that an expanded continuum of options is necessary. This continuum can be described as falling into five broad categories, beginning at one end with no direct government involvement and finishing at the other end with the government taking total responsibility for providing care. As with all continuums, the categories are "soft around the edges" and may overlap slightly. They are:

2.1 Family care

This is the preferred situation, in which the young person remains with their existing family. Responsibility for care rests with the family; government provides support services if necessary to avoid the need for alternative care (see the chapter *Support Services*).

2.2 Family-arranged care

Family-arranged care is that in which a family finds an alternative caregiver without outside assistance. Families often deal with internal problems by arranging their own alternative care. A typical example is a relative or neighbour taking a child in while the parent goes into hospital.

The arrangements are usually informal, and government involvement (if any) revolves around support services. Responsibility for care is shared between the parent and alternative caregiver.

2.3 Family-initiated/government-supported care

In this option, the family plays the primary role in choosing where the child is going to live. The social worker supports the family in finding the most familiar setting possible for the alternative care, and provides ongoing support and financial resources to the chosen home. This is in keeping with the shared parenting concept described in the chapter *Guardianship: Past and Future*.

2.4 Government-initiated/family-supported care

In these cases, the government takes greater responsibility because the child's need for alternative care clearly exceeds the family's current ability to plan or provide it. The social worker will choose among available options (such as group homes) with limited input from the family, and the options may be entirely government-provided (such as traditional foster homes). Nonetheless, the social worker must ensure the family's participation to the extent that they are capable and willing.

"When a child must be taken out of the home, place the child with grandparents, other family members, or friends rather than strangers."

_____ Foster parent

2.5 Government-provided care

There are cases where young people have no family available to participate in their alternative care. In these circumstances, the government takes full responsibility and provides the necessary alternative care. The social worker must ensure that the child or youth has access to appropriate advocacy services (see the chapter *Advocacy*).

Currently, most alternative care falls into the Government-initiated and Government-provided categories of the continuum. An objective of the new Act should be to shift the focus to Family, Family-arranged and Family-initiated care categories, where the families have greater involvement and decision-making power. It involves building an individual placement around the individual child. It will take more time but the focus will be on what is best for the child and family. Whenever alternative care is being considered, social workers would be required to investigate with the family the possibility of arrangements falling within the first three categories. Only when these possibilities are exhausted should the last two categories be considered.

Family care and Family-arranged care may require support services as a way of keeping children in their family homes or networks, and most of the necessary options are therefore discussed in this report's chapter *Support Services*. We propose a mechanism to facilitate Family-initiated/Government-supported care: the multi-party agreement. Quite simply, it is a contract signed by all the involved parties outlining the roles, responsibilities and terms of the agreement. It truly shares the responsibility.

To illustrate, let us return to the example earlier in this chapter of the brother and sister for whom the rules had to be "bent". All the significant parties were satisfied that the best option was for the sister to live in the care of her brother; only the regulations prevented it. Under the new option, a written agreement setting out expectations and responsibilities of all concerned would be drawn up and signed by the following parties: the sister who wanted the care; the brother who agreed to provide it; the mother who approved it; and the social worker representing the government. After the signing of the agreement, the social worker's main responsibility would be to monitor the arrangement and provide any resources necessary for support.

Implementing this continuum would require modifying several existing programs. These would include the *Child in Home of Relative Program* and *Restricted Foster Homes*.

Furthermore, the descriptions of the continuum given does not cover all the options that may be necessary. We believe that other alternatives should be explored. These include:

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- “safe houses” for young people who need a safe place to stay for a short time regardless of who has custody;
- alternative accommodation for entire families (this accommodation should have varying degrees of support and services, and would be available for a range of time frames, from short-term crisis accommodation to longer term support); and,
- permanent housing for young people who are in care on a long-term basis.

In summary, we believe that the orientation in alternative care should change from one that looks for reasons to remove young people from their homes to one that looks for ways to help them stay there and resolve the problems they have. This orientation would see the creation of individual care plans for each young person, rather than trying to fit each young person into existing arrangements.

Therefore, we recommend that:

5. Government must provide more options for family support in order to permit young people to stay in their existing family and community networks.
6. Government must develop options that maximize the participation of families in planning alternative care, and in maintaining ties with their children while they are in alternative care.
7. Social workers must be required to investigate all possible options that use family and community networks before using government-provided options.
8. Government must design an option that allows for multi-party agreements on alternative care among families, children, caregivers, social workers and all other interested parties.

3. Abuse while in care

We heard many reports from young people about abuse they suffered during their time in care. Children and youth are abused not only by adults but by other young people. Abuse occurs in all types of settings, from foster homes to institutions. We cannot judge the full extent of this abuse, but we accept the firmly held opinion of these young people that it happens with alarming frequency.

“I was abused in three foster homes. There was no acknowledgement of this pain and suffering by the system.”

————— Former child in care



Government currently offers only limited treatment and compensation to young people who have been abused while in care. We believe that whatever the type of abuse suffered while in care, government has an obligation to the victims to provide:

- treatment;
- compensation (for life if necessary);
- support during any legal process arising from the abuse, including help in pressing charges against the abuser; and
- an apology from the government.

**" Children / youth often are
not believed when they
complain of ill treatment."**

Youth in care

In addition to dealing fairly with its victims, abuse in care must be addressed from many angles. We believe that if many of the other recommendations in this report are implemented, there will be fewer incidents of abuse. However, additional measures are necessary.

First, a child advocate service must be available to every child or youth in alternative care or who is receiving support services. This recommendation should be referred to the Family and Child Advocacy Office that we are recommending be established (see the chapter *Advocacy*). In addition, social workers and caregivers must be instructed to report to the Family and Child Advocacy Office every allegation of abuse occurring while a person is in care, or that occurred while the person was in care.

Second, mechanisms must be developed that allow children and young people to safely air their concerns about the places where they are living or have lived. For example, social workers could hold annual Child in Care meetings to review each resource for which the social worker is responsible. While not mandatory, attendance by children and youth would be invited, with the assurance that they are free to speak candidly about the facility. This would be an effective monitoring mechanism for abusive situations, and would also increase young people's feeling of control over their lives.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 9. Young people who are abused while in government care must be offered treatment, compensation and support during any legal process arising from the abuse.**
- 10. Every child or youth in alternative care or receiving support services must be offered the services of the Family and Child Advocacy Office.**

- 11. Mechanisms must be developed that allow young people to speak, on a regular basis and without fear of retribution, about the alternative care resources in which they live.**

4. Standards for government-developed care

Alternative care arranged by government and provided by trained caregivers must meet high standards of accountability because of the government's direct responsibility as the developer of the alternate arrangement. However, British Columbia currently has no government-wide standards. Each ministry, and indeed many individual programs, have their own standards and regulations.

There is currently some confusion between **standards**, which are guidelines intended to be applied broadly, and **procedures**, which are specific to given programs or facilities. In order to be effective, standards for alternative care must meet the following criteria:

- Standards must be applicable to all ministries and programs.
- They must be based upon a set of guiding principles. We recommend adoption of the principles of this report.
- Standards must provide guidelines and frameworks; they must not be written at the level of procedures. They should be broad enough to permit policies and procedures to be created for individual programs or facilities, while maintaining an overall consistency in approach and spirit.
- They must be created in consultation with professionals, caregivers, community representatives and community service providers, and both children and families who have experience of alternative care.
- Standards must be flexible enough to allow room for the application of common sense.
- Standards should always include provisions for evaluation and enforcement.

The panel is aware that some processes for creating standards appear to have no end. We believe that established time limits and work plans are necessary components for creating standards.

- 12. A single set of inter-ministerial standards must be created for all child and youth care facilities developed, operated or contracted by government.**

5. Post-care services

Until recently, young people in the care of the Ministry of Social Services were "discharged" from the *Family and Child Service Act* at 19 years of age. We heard over and over again that "real parents" don't abandon their children when they turn 19, and neither should the Ministry if it has become the legal parent. Expecting these young people to magically turn into self-sufficient young adults is unrealistic. Young people in the care of the Ministry have unique needs. For the most part they have not had stability and continuity in their lives, and many have experienced some form of abuse either within their families or while in alternative care. Some have had a number of different caregivers and have had to live with totally unpredictable relationships.

The Ministry of Social Services introduced post-majority services this year, a program that provides support for young people to continue their education, and for those who have special needs. We do not believe this program goes far enough to address the needs of young people in care who turn 19 and have to leave the "system".

Current programs contain no recognition of the significant role that caregivers play in the lives of youth in care, and the benefits of being able to continue the relationship. We believe that post-care services must be created to meet the individual needs of young people who are leaving care. For some, this may mean support while they continue their education as in post-majority services. Some may need financial support, or counselling services, or perhaps counselling for both them and their birth families, as this is a time when young people in care often want to re-establish their roots. People with developmental disabilities may need continuation of all the services they were receiving before they turned 19, including support to caregivers.

These options should be available until the age of 24, which we believe is a more realistic age to expect independence. It should be kept in mind that in the chapter *Youth Services* we are recommending that the age of majority be lowered to 18 years.

**"Parents don't abandon kids
at 19, nor should we."**

————— *Social worker*

Therefore, we recommend:

- 13. Post-care services must be available to all young people leaving the child-in-care system at the age of majority.**
- 14. Post-care services must be comprehensive and include all programs and services available to young people in care.**
- 15. Post-care services must be based on the individual needs of the young person and their families, and may include alternative caregivers.**

6. "Treatment" vs. "care"

There has been a long-standing debate in child welfare about what constitutes "treatment", what constitutes "care", and who should provide what. We believe this debate is essentially a territorial one based in squabbles over professional or ministerial "turf". The distinction is not only artificial but harmful to the interests of young people.

As a term used in child welfare, "care" receives less respect than "treatment". The day-in, day-out experience of the caregiver, often gained during months spent looking after a particular child, is all too often discounted against the opinions of psychologists or doctors who may base their opinions on a single visit lasting less than an hour.

The panel does not ignore the valuable contributions that experts make when treatment (in the sense of a specialist's intervention) is required. However, "treatment" when used in that sense does not describe the needs of the majority of children in care. It implies that children are sick and that treatment will "fix" them. This ignores the reality that, in many cases, the best treatment for behavioural and emotional problems is not expensive drugs or complicated therapy, but the stable, nurturing environment that only an experienced and sensitive caregiver can provide.

7. Secure care

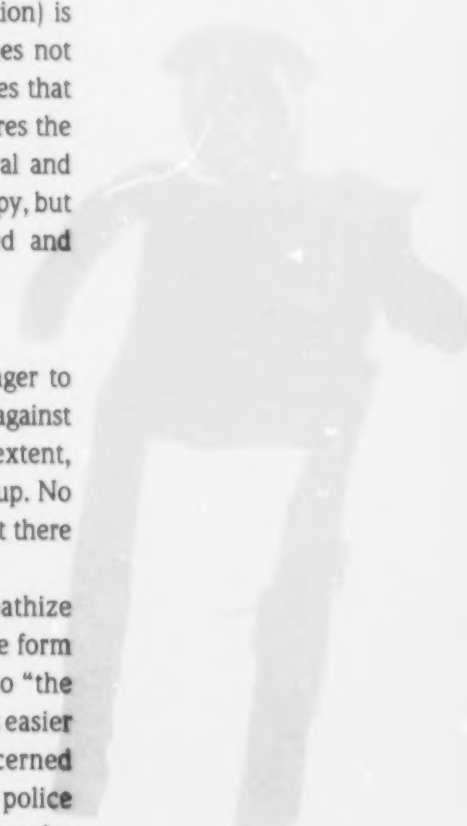
The question of what to do with people who are a danger to themselves or to others is an old one. It pits individual liberty against society's need to protect its members. "Secure care" is, to a large extent, a euphemism; in plain English, it means locking young people up. No one **wants** to do it, but most people we heard from agreed that there sometimes seems little alternative.

The subject is complicated. On the one hand, we sympathize with the desperate parents we heard from who wanted some form of secure care to prevent their children from running away to "the street". On the other hand, we recognize that "secure care" is easier said than done. Social workers and other caregivers are concerned about legal liability if they attempt to provide secure care. The police are understandably reluctant to restrict the liberty of someone who has not committed a crime and who they perceive not to be in immediate danger.

The issue is further complicated by the division of authority between ministries. The *Young Offenders Act*, administered by the Attorney General, provides for secure care but in doing so criminalizes the young person. The *Mental Health Act*, administered by the Ministry of Health, provides for secure care without criminalization but introduces the necessity of diagnosis and treatment. Neither is helpful to the

**"Kick the fences down
between care and treatment."**

————— Caregiver



parent who just wants a child kept off the street or a caregiver faced with severe "acting out".

The panel has difficulty accepting any solution that criminalizes children and we reject using a medical justification for restraint on personal liberty when the problem is clearly not medical. We cannot make any recommendation on this issue in this report, but note that the Ministry of Health is currently reviewing the *Mental Health Act*. The review will include an examination of involuntary treatment, which is closely related to secure care. We hope that this broader examination of the issue will provide insights that can be applied to children and youth.



Alternative Care Recommendations

1. Continuity and stability of care must be adopted both as a goal and as a guiding principle in alternative care. This should include continuity and stability in family relationships, in residence and caregivers, and in social workers.
2. Mechanisms must be created to allow young people who have been in care together to keep track of each other once they are separated or leave alternative care.
3. Mechanisms must be created to help social workers and caregivers to stay in touch with the young people who have been their responsibilities.
4. Efforts and resources must be made to collect and preserve the personal history of each young person in care.
5. Government must provide more options for family support in order to permit young people to stay in their existing family and community networks.
6. Government must develop options that maximize the participation of families in planning alternative care, and in maintaining ties with their children while they are in alternative care.
7. Social workers must be required to investigate all possible options that use family and community networks before using government-provided options.
8. Government must design an option that allows for multi-party agreements on alternative care among families, children, caregivers, social workers and all other interested parties.
9. Young people who are abused while in government care must be offered treatment, compensation and support during any legal process arising from the abuse.
10. Every child or youth in alternative care or receiving support services must be offered the services of the Family and Child Advocacy Office.
11. Mechanisms must be developed that allow young people to speak, on a regular basis and without fear of retribution, about the alternative care resources in which they live.

- 12.** A single set of inter-ministerial standards must be created for all child and youth care facilities developed, operated or contracted by the government.
- 13.** Post-care Services must be available to all young people leaving the child-in-care system at the age of majority.
- 14.** Post-care Services must be comprehensive and include all programs and services available to young people in care.
- 15.** Post-care Services must be based on the individual needs of the young person and their families, and may include alternative caregivers.



Staff

"Some of the worst tragedies related to our work with children have been the result of a lack of contact. To view the child protection service worker as simply a 'broker' or 'case manager' leaves many children at high risk."

SOCIAL WORKER





Staff

Principles

We believe:

- The provincial government has a direct responsibility to provide family support services through adequate allotment of staff.
- There is a direct link between the morale of Ministry staff and the quality of service they are able to provide.
- The staff should reflect the character of the society and proportionally represent women and members of the disabled, visible minority and aboriginal communities.
- Direct services to families is the most important work in the Ministry. Social workers' decisions have serious and life-long consequences for the families they serve. The Ministry must provide a working environment and culture that places the needs of families and children above the needs of the organization.
- Staff input and involvement must be sought by the Ministry in the development and review of programs, policies and procedures that relate to family and children's services.

Perspective

Families and youth expressed a wide range of opinion about staff. Because the relationship between staff and families and children can become quite personal, staff have a responsibility to families that is unique among government employees. The need for mutual trust between staff and families as well as a sense of continuity for children is of vital importance in these relationships.

Some families expressed anger because they felt threatened or controlled by staff; others told us that staff were very helpful to them. Youth and children told us of how important their relationships with staff were. They complained about staff turnover and reassignments, which meant that they kept having to readjust to new staff. Many youth and children told us that they were not able to establish a good relationship with staff because of this lack of continuity and consistency and that, because of this, they felt unimportant and isolated. Youth also

"The present legislation gives too much power to young inexperienced professionals with new ideas and no experience raising families."

Parent

"Our experience with the professionals involved with our ... family are inexperienced in the area of parenting, do not remain in their position for any length of time, have enormous caseloads thus only deal with families in crisis."

Foster parent

expressed frustration with staff because they were often unavailable to address their needs, usually because staff were busy on other work. Sometimes, youth expected staff to be their advocates and were disappointed when staff did not fulfill this role.

Members of the community, service providers and caregivers told us that the family and child services system was confusing. They often did not know who was responsible for particular duties, such as granting funds, and felt that this confusion concerning roles created major service delivery problems. They told us that this confusion was increased by the use of specialized professional language that was difficult to understand. They also complained that staff were often unavailable.

For their part, many staff expressed concerns and fears about being in a particularly vulnerable position because of the type of work they do. Because many staff must intervene in family life, they feel that they are resented by some families and may find themselves in an unsafe situation. Furthermore, they feel that they are being scrutinized critically and constantly because of public expectations of their level of service and the continual review of their work by the Ministry. Media attention heightens this feeling of being watched and judged constantly.

Many staff told us that they felt that their work was undervalued by the Ministry and pointed to the dramatic rise in the use of contract staff as an indicator of this. The traditional rationale for using contracting agencies is that they are cheaper and more efficient than government staff. From a staff perspective, contractors are often given the most interesting work, such as direct care. Staff are left doing the jobs perceived as negative; social workers remove children from homes and financial assistance workers sometimes have to deny money to families. Staff feel that they have few options for positive, direct involvement with families. This has an effect on the public perspective of staff as well. Many members of the public expressed fear of staff because of their role in policing family services.

We heard from Ministry staff who complained that their workloads were far too demanding and that they were often frustrated because both their managers and the public expected them to accomplish too much. They felt that this problem was aggravated by onerous administrative and paperwork requirements that prevent them from working directly with families and giving them the support they need. Staff often complained that they lack the necessary resources to do their jobs and that senior management fail to support them in their decisions. Some staff told us that they felt isolated and inadequately trained for the work they do.

Issues

1. Workload

We believe that workload is an important staff issue because there is a direct connection between workload and the quality of service delivery. We distinguish between "caseload" and "workload" by noting that a caseload is a numerically based work assignment, while a workload is the amount of actual effort required to do the job.

Caseload levels have fluctuated, but the workload expectations placed on staff have risen dramatically over the years. Staff believe that this workload increase leads to serious morale problems and that these problems are made worse by unrealistic expectations, unsupportive senior management and a lack of resources for staff to do their work effectively. Generally, staff expressed a common belief that they were unprepared for the workload and the level of effort required to meet their responsibilities. Many staff complained that they had to do so many administrative tasks and fulfill so many paperwork demands that they were unable to devote adequate time to providing service for families and children. They feel that the paperwork requirements are unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming because of the excessive number of forms. They believe that many bureaucratic requirements are unnecessary and, more importantly, that they focus on improving the organization at the expense of providing quality services for families.

Staff explained that effective service delivery requires that staff must have both the resources and the tools to do their jobs. Resources include a range of services that they can draw upon to assist families. They also felt that they needed the physical equipment that would help them accomplish their workload. These tools include healthy working conditions, access to all necessary information and equipment, such as cars, fax machines and private phone lines, and that these tools must be in good repair and reasonably modern. Staff observed that the Ministry often compromises the quality of its service because these tools are unavailable or in disrepair. They believe that the root cause of these problems is the lack of funding available for necessary repairs and acquisitions.

The 1992 Auditor General's audit of the Ministry of Social Services¹ points out that the Ministry has no viable system in place to deal with the projected workload. We heard this observation from many staff and agree with the Auditor General's analysis of this issue. For example, staff told us that the Ministry is unable to determine its long-term needs for specific types of social workers and where they will be needed because planning is done year-to-year, rather than on the

"Any ways that can be devised for reducing rather than increasing paperwork and the amount of time required will be welcomed by workers as well as trees."

_____ *Ministry staff member*

"We as workers can no longer continue to accept our complicity on putting a lid on boiling pots and only dealing with the pots already boiled over. This fire fighting approach is so obviously not cost effective over time."

_____ *Social worker*

"Allocation of staff is based generally on the number of children in care; this formula penalizes those who use alternatives to avoid children coming into care and discourages proactive family service."

Ministry staff member

basis of long-term planning and projections. In addition to this lack of knowledge, the Ministry's resource allocation methods focus on dividing up resources where needed while ignoring the larger issue of the amount of resources available.

The Ministry must commit itself to integrated staff supply and demand research that will support long-term planning. Only in this way can future staff allocations be made strategically and on a needs basis, rather than reactively as they are made now. The Ministry of Social Services' allocation formula must address the size of the resource "pie" first and then consider how that "pie" will be divided up.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. Staff planning must be long-term and based on integrated supply and demand research.
2. A mechanism must be implemented to include child and family services staff in all decision-making related to staff and workload rationalization, resource allocation and training.
3. The Ministry of Social Services must simplify its administrative requirements and ensure that they focus on the needs of the family instead of the needs of the organization.
4. The Ministry of Social Services must provide healthy working environments, including the necessary equipment and information to meet the service needs of families and children.

2. Vulnerability

Because of the type of work staff do, especially removal of children from their families and making decisions concerning eligibility for financial assistance, they are uniquely vulnerable. Families have a mixed attitude toward them. Some families felt that staff did good work in difficult situations and expressed very positive attitudes towards them; others were so angry with staff that they insisted on legislation that would make staff personally and legally liable for their decisions so that they could be sued.

Staff often told us that they feel that they work in jobs where they "just can't win". For example, they complained that half of the time they are criticized by the public and the media for not intervening in family matters quickly enough; the rest of the time they are criticized for moving too quickly. They told us that no one speaks for them when they are criticized. The public, as a result, is often dissatisfied with service levels and may even blame systemic problems on them.

"Most of our clients have an image of the ministry as an overpowering bully who does not look after the best interests of their families. They view the ministry as having too much power with too little accountability."

Community agency

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

Staff feel additionally vulnerable because they fear reprisal from their own employer, the Ministry of Social Services. They feel the need to document and justify every professional decision in over-scrupulous detail. When critical incidents or complaints related to a case occur, staff have a tendency to feel anxious because they perceive that Ministry management will try to find fault with their decisions. As a result, staff often feel that they are blamed for a system that is not working very well.

Of particular note, staff told us they feel especially vulnerable because of the Ministry's Inspections and Standards Unit (ISU). The role of this unit is to "audit" social work decisions and case planning and to investigate complaints about how the Ministry has handled a given case. Staff told us that they feel that the Inspections and Standards Unit's audit and review procedures are too punitive and unfair. As well, staff told us that because the ISU is an internal Ministry body without any external accountability, they feel that they have become scapegoats for a system that protects the interests of the Ministry, not the interests of families, children or staff.



"No ministry should be allowed to self-police."

Social worker

Therefore, we recommend that:

5. The Ministry of Social Services must ensure that any systems or structures set up to audit or review staff decisions or to respond to complaints about cases comply with the principles of administrative fairness and have external accountability.
6. An ongoing public education campaign concerning the role of Ministry of Social Services' staff must be initiated.
7. The Ministry of Social Services must take an active role in addressing and responding to public and media concerns.

3. Equity

We believe that equity is an important staff issue because our pluralistic communities must feel that their make-up is reflected by the people who assist them. Only when these groups are fairly represented will there be an appropriate level of sensitivity to meet the needs of all people on their own terms. Under-representation has a major impact upon service delivery. Many members of under-represented groups do not feel comfortable when in contact with the Ministry of Social Services because they do not feel that their perspective or way of life will be understood. Families feel alienated from the staff who are responsible for helping them.

Families from minority communities complained that staff often

"The ministry must make conscious efforts to recruit visible minorities. Staffing should reflect the realities of our multi-cultural society. The ministry must hire community development workers for ethnic communities."

Community agency

"Ministry staff should be trained to recognize cultural differences and incorporate these differences into planning for children and their families."

Community member

"A child welfare office that does not include women as members of the supervisory and management team, thereby creating a breeding ground for decisions and actions that lack sensitivity to women's perspectives (ensures) gender bias."

Community agency

did not understand their cultural heritage and that staff were insensitive to their needs. They felt that the lack of staff from their own culture created barriers to effective service. Additionally, families from ethnic communities routinely encounter difficulties with language and cross-cultural communication. For example, they may enter an office that has posted a sign saying that services are available in other languages, yet the sign is written only in English. Families have little confidence that a system with such oversights can assist them. Families felt that the unavailability of staff who could translate information or who could respectfully understand family concepts and traditions from other cultures was a serious shortcoming of the Ministry of Social Services.

Families and staff noted that there were very few disabled staff and that disabled family members often had major difficulties getting access to services. They cited the lack of wheelchair ramps and the lack of signing services for the hearing-impaired as two examples of access problems. They also noted that few special considerations are given to disabled staff who must sometimes struggle to work in inappropriate environments.

Disabled people, visible minorities and Aboriginal people have been under-represented in the Ministry of Social Services as in the rest of government. Women, while over-represented numerically within the Ministry, represent only 40% of the supervisory and management-level positions.

Many families told us they felt that the ministry management were mostly white males who held attitudes that did not address their needs. Families felt that they had to fit into the government's way of thinking and that their own attitudes and needs were undervalued or not considered.

Staff expressed concerns that they were sometimes unable to fully understand the perspective of families from ethnic communities, even though they were trying to do so. Staff from minority groups stated that they often have low morale because they perceive that they lack equal opportunities for career advancement. Natural leaders are unable to receive recognition and promotion because of systemic barriers that keep them in jobs that do not allow them to meet their full potential.

Although the government is attempting to address equity issues through forthcoming legislation, these changes have been too long in coming. The government must redress the inequities within its system by ensuring through policy that no one group should be privileged over any other. This legislation should not just look towards the future but it should correct past injustices.

Therefore, we recommend that:

8. A thorough review of recruitment, hiring and promotion criteria must be undertaken and that all systemic barriers to equity must be eliminated.
9. The Ministry of Social Services must actively recruit and hire more disabled, Aboriginal and visible minority staff, and all hiring practices must take the pluralistic nature of society into account.
10. The Ministry of Social Services must review its promotion policies and practices to ensure that the pluralistic nature of society is reflected at all levels of operation.
11. The Ministry of Social Services must provide all the necessary supports to allow disabled people to hold positions as appropriate in the organization.
12. All Ministry of Social Services' communications must be inclusive of minorities and provide a positive role model for the rest of government and the private sector.

4. Recruitment and retention

We heard repeatedly about the difficulty of recruiting and retaining Ministry staff in northern and rural communities. Many staff perceive these communities as training grounds or first jobs until they can get transferred to larger southern communities. This causes high turnover and decreases the quality of service given to these communities.

Currently, the Ministry requires all social workers to have a post-secondary degree or seven years of related experience. Generally, the Ministry only hires people with academic qualifications. This "bottom-line" requirement values academic credentials more highly than knowledge gained through experience or familiarity with the local community and its needs. The selection process tends to rely too much on assessing formal knowledge and skills rather than demonstrated professional abilities that may not be evident in traditional hiring interviews. As a result, opportunities for hiring local, culturally sensitive and knowledgeable staff are often lost.

To ensure that academic knowledge and skills are balanced with work experience, the Ministry of Social Services should move towards competency-based hiring. Competency-based hiring is a process of identifying the key job-related knowledge and skills that a candidate must demonstrate to meet the entry-level requirements for a position.

The use of competency-based selection criteria attempts to ensure that equally competent people have equal access to job opportunities. Competency-based hiring does not mean that hiring standards are being lowered. It recognizes that academic qualifications alone do not guarantee competency and that some knowledge and skills are best learned through experience. Clearly, knowledge of the local community is an asset for family and children's services work. Competency-based hiring reduces the reliance on credentials that often reinforces systemic barriers in the selection process. Competency-based hiring also puts the onus on the government to provide training for its staff. To achieve this training, the Ministry of Social Services should develop a certification program with participation from all its consumers.

Therefore, we recommend that:

13. The Ministry of Social Services must adopt a policy of competency-based hiring. This policy must recognize knowledge of the local community and other related experiences, as well as academic qualifications.
14. The Ministry of Social Services must develop a certification program that will give formal recognition to all family and child welfare workers. This certification must:
 - describe the requirement of competency-based standards in family and children's services;
 - be developed with the full participation of all consumers;
 - allow accreditation for completed competency-based training;
 - ensure that training for competency-based standards is readily available throughout the province; and
 - become known to the general public.
15. The Ministry of Social Services must increase the availability of general and recruiting information in languages other than English, and of information directed specifically toward under-represented groups.

5. Training

Training for family and child services staff is inadequate at all levels both within academic institutions and within the Ministry of Social Services. Our views were influenced by the many staff who complained that they were inadequately prepared for their work and that their

desire to enhance their abilities was continually frustrated by high workload demands and by a lack of support from senior management. Staff told us that they were unable to keep up with new and emerging knowledge and that they were unable to benefit from the skills and experience of other professionals working in their field.

Currently, little training in child welfare is available as part of university or community college social work curricula. This means that family and child services staff have no specific academic training whatsoever in the area for which they have been hired.

At the entry level, all family and child welfare staff hired by the Ministry are given three one-week sessions of training during their probationary period. Given the absence of education concerning child welfare at the post-secondary level, this level of training is clearly insufficient to prepare staff for their difficult job. It is notable that probation officers in the Ministry of Attorney General receive a full three months of training for similar jobs. The three weeks training that staff receive is inadequate.

Ongoing training is required in the job description of most employees, but is sporadic and often neglected as workloads increase. The field of family and child services is dynamic, but the Ministry of Social Services is not ensuring that staff are able to keep up-to-date with new knowledge. According to one staff survey², managers have better access to training than staff involved in direct service. Heavy workloads and Ministry of Social Services' cost constraints are most commonly cited as reasons for staff being unable to attend training courses. Training is often seen as an interruption imposed on an overloaded schedule.

To compound the problems of the relevance of training and access to training, the Ministry of Social Services is unable to consistently evaluate the appropriateness of training and its usefulness in helping staff do their jobs. The Auditor General's Report, 1992, indicates that the Ministry of Social Services "does not have a process...to evaluate the merits of training programs against work requirements in the districts. Furthermore, it has no systematic assessment of training costs. As a result, the Ministry of Social Services does not know whether its central training is cost-effective."³ A lack of coordination among ministries prevents training from becoming an integrated activity.

We believe that the importance of all types of family and child services training must be recognized and that training levels must be dramatically increased and broadened. At the post-secondary level, we believe that flexible training options such as the Registered Social Worker and the condensed Bachelor of Social Work degrees should be

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reinstated. We also believe that all social worker degrees should include family and child services as a major area of study.

At the entry level, the inadequate three weeks of training now given new staff should be replaced with six months of continuous training prior to beginning the job. Staff input should be encouraged around all decisions related to ongoing training so that it is linked to their needs. Ongoing training must be given a much higher priority and greater support by senior management. Ongoing staff training must be undertaken in a manner that includes both staff and management in similar courses so that new knowledge and skills can be effectively implemented. Furthermore, all Ministry of Social Services and contract agency staff require consistent training concerning equity issues.

Therefore, we recommend that:

- 16.** Professional training in child welfare must be central to social work education at the university and college level.
- 17.** Universities and colleges must initiate cooperative education programs to provide students with practical work experience in the family and child welfare field.
- 18.** The Ministry of Social Services must provide an intensive, full-time training program of at least six months for all entry-level positions prior to assuming workload responsibilities.
- 19.** Ongoing generalist training courses must be developed to increase skill levels and to provide staff with information on social issues that affect their work (e.g., poverty, multiculturalism and Native issues).
- 20.** Cross-cultural and anti-racism training must be an integral part of all training for all Ministry of Social Services' staff.
- 21.** In addition to Ministry of Social Services' staff, community and consumer representatives must be included in the development of training programs.

¹ Auditor General's Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly, June 1992.

² R.A. Matatest and Associates, *Staff Survey*, 1990, p. 47.

³ Auditor General's Report, 1992, p. 58.

Staff Recommendations

1. Staff planning must be long-term and based on integrated supply and demand research.
2. A mechanism must be implemented to include child and family services staff in all decision-making related to staff and workload rationalization, resource allocation and training.
3. The Ministry of Social Services must simplify its administrative requirements and ensure that they focus on the needs of the family instead of the needs of the organization.
4. The Ministry of Social Services must provide healthy working environments, including the necessary equipment and information to meet the service needs of families and children.
5. The Ministry of Social Services must ensure that any systems or structures set up to audit or review staff decisions or to respond to complaints about cases comply with the principles of administrative fairness and have external accountability.
6. An ongoing public education campaign concerning the role of Ministry of Social Services' staff must be initiated.
7. The Ministry of Social Services must take an active role in addressing and responding to public and media concerns.
8. A thorough review of recruitment, hiring and promotion criteria must be undertaken and all systemic barriers to equity must be eliminated.
9. The Ministry of Social Services must actively recruit and hire more disabled, Aboriginal and visible minority staff and all hiring practices must take the pluralistic nature of society into account.
10. The Ministry of Social Services must review its promotion policies and practices to ensure that the pluralistic nature of society is reflected at all levels of operation.

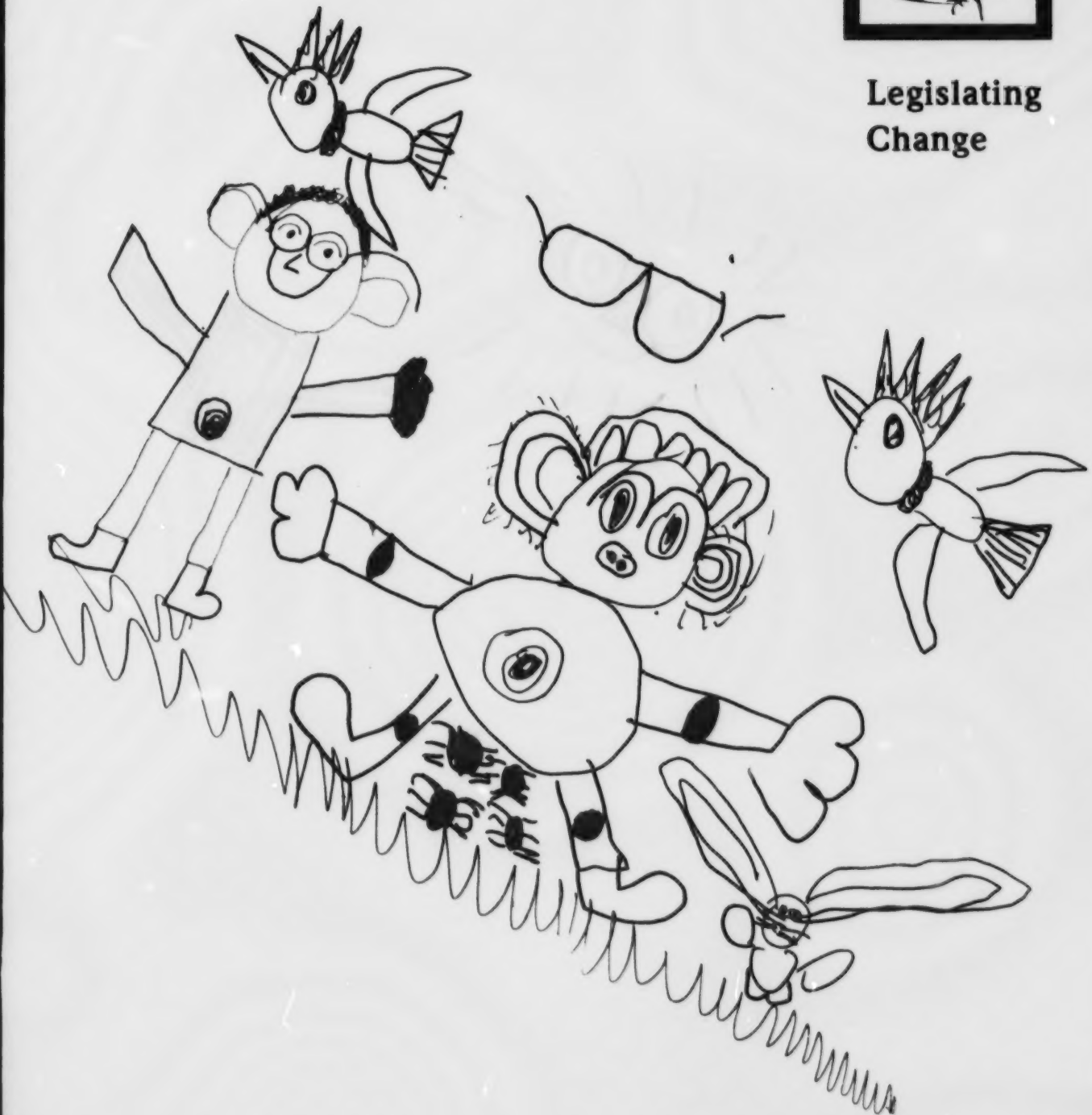
- 11.** The Ministry of Social Services must provide all the necessary supports to allow disabled people to hold positions as appropriate in the organization.
- 12.** All Ministry of Social Services communications must be inclusive of minorities and provide a positive role model for the rest of government and the private sector.
- 13.** The Ministry of Social Services must adopt a policy of competency-based hiring. This policy must recognize knowledge of the local community and other related work experience, as well as academic qualifications.
- 14.** The Ministry of Social Services must develop a certification program that will give formal recognition to all family and child welfare workers. This certification must:
 - describe the requirement of competency-based standards in family and children's services;
 - be developed with the full participation of all consumers;
 - allow accreditation for completed competency-based training;
 - ensure that training for competency-based standards is readily available throughout the province; and
 - become known to the general public.
- 15.** The Ministry of Social Services must increase the availability of general and recruiting information in languages other than English, and of information directed specifically toward under-represented groups.
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- 21.** In addition to Ministry of Social Services' staff, community and consumer representatives must be included in the development of training programs.



Legislating Change



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Legislating Change

The Minister of Social Services appointed the Community Panel to listen to public opinion concerning all issues relating to family and child services. We have listened. We have heard from families and children and from a wide range of community organizations and professionals associated with family and child services. On the basis of this extensive consultation we have written this report:

Making Changes: A Place to Start.

This report goes beyond recommending a framework for new legislation. During both our community consultation and our deliberations we were challenged to look beyond the "technical" words of the law. It became impossible not to make comments on both broad and specific social issues; not to "worry" about people receiving services and those providing them; not to look at administrative problems and possible solutions . . . in short to consider the system holistically rather than just from a legalistic viewpoint.

The previous chapters address this holistic approach. In this chapter we want to address both legislative considerations and implementation recommendations.

Legislative Considerations

We recommend the following general directions for new legislation:

- that new legislation must include the following principles:
 - ~ dignity and respect;
 - ~ inclusiveness;
 - ~ freedom from abuse;
 - ~ involvement;
 - ~ continuity and stability;
 - ~ equity; and
 - ~ close to home.
- that new legislation must be written in plain understandable language. It should allow words to have their natural meanings as much as this is possible without developing complicated definitions and specialist language.
- that all provincial acts that relate to families and children must be consolidated and that the government undertake

to complete this task by 1995. In the meantime, the enactment of this new legislation should not be delayed.

- that the new Act must include provision for the appointment of a permanent advisory council to the minister. This Council will advise the minister regarding necessary immediate changes and conduct a more comprehensive review of the new Act and accompanying services in 1997.

Almost all chapters within this report make recommendations that relate directly to new family and child services legislation or other related acts. We are listing these here by chapter title:

Poverty

- All income support programs must be raised to levels that allow families to provide for their basic needs.
- The government must bring back the position of Rentalsman in order to ensure fairness in the rental housing market.
- The minimum wage must be tied to a fixed percentage of the average weekly wage, as calculated by Statistics Canada.

Community Development

- The provincial government must provide clear mechanisms for communities to present their community needs assessment for funding consideration.

Access to Information

- Guidelines must be written to ensure that information held by government is relevant, accurate, complete and open to review by the individual to whom it pertains or who is responsible for the person to whom it pertains.
- People must have the right to correct, complete, challenge or remove information held by government.
- Individuals must be notified that a record about them or about people for whom they are responsible has been created.
- "Confidentiality" should be replaced by the word "privacy" in policies and procedures regarding family support and child protection, and in general usage by government staff working in these fields.

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- Standardized guidelines must be created for the sharing of personal information among ministries and agencies.
- Legislation must be enacted to provide for a single, standard process for employment screening, applicable to all government funded or regulated agencies dealing with vulnerable people. The employment screening process must:
 - ~ comply with the principles of administrative fairness, including right of appeal and relevance of information;
 - ~ be administered through a central agency, such as the Freedom of Information Privacy Commissioner; and
 - ~ address ongoing employment (where it is up to the employee to disclose charges or convictions of abuse and where failure to do so may be grounds for discipline).
- Government must adapt its information practices regarding adoptions to the principles on access to information contained in this report.

Advocacy

- An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office, responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature, should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases through a network of regional offices.
- Legislation must specify that before any decision is made regarding child protection and family support, families must be consulted as to their wishes. Families must have access to advocacy services during this process of consultation.

Support Services

- A mechanism must be established to allow communities to fulfill their obligation to develop family and child support service plans.

Youth Services

- The Ministry of Social Services must expand and enhance the range of services available to all youth and their families, regardless of whether the youth are in

care. These services range from family counselling and mediation services, to safe houses and crisis services for youth.

- Amendments must be made to the *GAIN Act* to allow youth between age 16 and the age of majority to be eligible for income assistance. Emergency assistance must be available to these youth without conditions. Ongoing assistance must be available and be based on a thorough assessment of the needs of the youth in the context of their families and communities. Eligibility for ongoing financial support must not be tied to the youth's acceptance of services.
- Responsibility for all programs and institutions administered under the *Young Offenders Act* must be transferred from the Ministry of Attorney General to the Ministry of Social Services.
- The legal age of majority must be reduced to 18 years.

Service Delivery Structure

- The ministries of Health, Social Services, Attorney General and Education must adopt a common philosophy and common values, develop a common service language and a compatible financial system and policies, adopt a common set of geographic boundaries, and consistent privacy rules and information-sharing practices, and develop compatible management and administrative structures to support the delivery of services from local, integrated centres.
- Government must appoint a Select Committee of the Legislature on Families and Children. One of its functions will be to monitor and evaluate this integrated system.

Guardianship: Past and Future

- Common law meaning of "guardianship of the person of the child" should be abolished to prevent legal disputes over conflicting meaning. In new legislation, the term "guardianship of the person" must be eliminated and other related provincial legislation follow suit in stages.
- The term "kinship" must be defined as the significant bond between birth families and their children and be included in the new legislation.

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- The term "custody" must be defined as the total responsibility for the well-being of the child and be included in the new legislation.
- The term "care" must be defined as the authority to meet the day-to-day needs of the child and be included in the new legislation.
- Provision must be made for shared parenting agreements in the new legislation.
- The term "adoption" must be defined as the life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship, which is the bond between the child and the birth family.
- The option of self-custody must be available to youth from the age of 16 years to the age of majority through an adjudicated process and a review must be conducted concerning appropriate criteria and suitability tests for self-custody.
- The new legislation must enable groups to obtain custody.
- The term "Superintendent" must be replaced by "Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services".
- The Ministry of Social Services must place all administrative functions, including custodial authority and service provision, with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Family and Children's Services.
- An independent Family and Child Advocacy Office responsible to a Select Committee of the Legislature should be created to advocate on behalf of all families and children on systemic family and child issues. This office should also advocate in individual cases on a regional basis.

Dispute Resolution

- Community tribunals, constituted as administrative tribunals, must be established to replace the court system in all child protection disputes.
- Legislation must give community tribunals the authority to make decisions for child protection matters and self-custody.

- Government must make mediation services available to resolve disputes.

Child Protection

- The creation of specific definitions of abuse and neglect must always reflect the characteristics of harm, abuse of power and exploitation.
- Any definitions created must acknowledge the fact that physical, sexual and emotional abuse usually occur in combination.
- In any definition of neglect, systemic neglect and parental/caregiver neglect must be differentiated.
- The creation of definitions must start with a clear statement of their purpose and intent, and that definitions be age-related and respectful of community standards.
- The new legislation must use the following terms:
 - ~ "remove" and "removal" in place of "apprehend" and "apprehension";
 - ~ "inquiry" in place of "investigation"; and
 - ~ "in need of mandatory service" in place of "in need of protection".
- The new legislation must include provision for removing the offender in all situations of abuse.
- When calls from the community are received, there must be **legislation** enabling the social worker to make one of three decisions: no further involvement; begin a child protection inquiry; or offer a family service, either directly or in collaboration with the community.
- Criteria must be developed to assess social workers' skill and competence in the area of child protection. Receiving delegated authority to conduct an inquiry must be dependent upon meeting these skill and competence criteria.
- In cases where it has been determined that a child is at risk and some form of intervention is required, social workers must be obligated to assess and offer all appropriate support services they deem necessary to keep the family together and free from harm, and that the Ministry of Social Services



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be obligated to ensure that those services are available.

- Family conferences/involved persons meetings must be available at any stage of a child protection inquiry.
- Before a request for a non-emergency removal is made, a family conference or involved persons meeting must have taken place.
- The new legislation must define emergencies as situations that expose a child to extreme or imminent harm, or life-threatening circumstances.
- In all but emergency situations, child protection matters must be adjudicated before removal can occur.
- In emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal within 24 hours of removing the child. The tribunal must make a same-day (no adjournments allowed) decision as to whether the removal was warranted or not.
- If the removal was warranted, the tribunal must approve a short-term plan for the child's care pending a full hearing, which must commence within 14 days.
- In non-emergency situations, matters must be brought before the community tribunal for an initial hearing to determine whether further intervention is required. Within 24 hours, the community tribunal must decide whether the child can remain in the home until a full hearing is completed, or if the child needs to be removed. A full hearing must commence within 14 days.
- Whenever removal and/or ongoing involvement is deemed necessary, a full plan must be developed that meets the legal test of being the "least detrimental alternative" for the child.
- All plans must be subject to immediate reviews by the community tribunal, which may be initiated by any involved party, including the child.
- The community tribunal must be responsible for ensuring that children do not "drift" within the social services system. Therefore, reviews must be conducted twice a year, with dates being set according to the child's needs.
- The new legislation must contain the following provisions:
 - ~ All people have the responsibility to report known or

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suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

- ~ The privacy of the reporter will be maintained wherever possible.
- ~ People who make reports in good faith will not be personally liable.

Alternative Care

- Government must develop options that maximize the participation of families in planning alternative care, and in maintaining ties with their children while they are in alternative care.
- Government must design an option that allows for multi-party agreements on alternative care among families, children, caregivers, social workers and all other interested parties.
- Every child or youth in alternative care or receiving support services must be offered the services of the Family and Child Advocacy Office.
- Post-care services must be available to all young people leaving the Child in Care system at the age of majority.

Finally, we recommend that:

- the new legislation be called *The Family and Community Service Act*.
- the Act provide the mechanism for funding all of the services and programs it prescribes.

Implementation Recommendations

We believe that new legislation will provide an important framework for family and child services, but that legislation is only as good as the policies, procedures, practices and resources that assist in implementing it.

The implementation of this report crosses the lines of several ministries. Furthermore, we are aware that ours is not the only planning and review process that is either under way or beginning implementation planning. Here is a partial list of others:

- *The Royal Commission Report on Health Care and Costs;*
- *The Family Justice Review Committee;*

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- *A Review of Legal Services in British Columbia;*
- *Is Anyone Listening: The Task Force on Family Violence;*
- *Mental Health Act* review; and
- *Sullivan Royal Commission: Towards the Year 2000.*

Therefore, we are recommending that government establish a senior level inter-ministerial mechanism to coordinate the implementation of all of these reports in an integrated manner.

A few concluding remarks:

This review has raised hope for change.

This review has raised expectation for involvement.

We have deliberately called this report ***Making Changes: A Place to Start***. We have come to believe that there is a will on all levels for **making changes** and we hope we have presented **a place to start**.

Appendix 1: Submissions

The Community Panel would like to apologize in advance to any individuals or groups who may have been omitted or incorrectly identified on the list of submitters.

Individual and Group Presentations to the Community Panel

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karl Fischer • Theo Kaehoom • Judy Stusiak, Adoptive Parents Association • Dr. Jane Cassie • Faye Wall • Len Liwitt • Ray Kollin • Johanna Campbell, Teacher • Richard Young • Mr. Stock • Annette Herbert • John Merz • Nadeleine Engh • Corine Rofte • Janis Yelland • Ada Tinkess • Dawn Fuller • Ministry of Social Services Staff, Ashcroft • Ashcroft Elementary School • Ashcroft R.C.M.P. • Ashcroft Hospital • Ministry of Social Services Staff, Campbell River, Courtenay and Port Hardy • Daina Heyd, Campbell River School District • Christine Elliott • Kathy Robertson • Linda Balcum • Donna McDonald • Ian Moker • Ray Hughes, Campbell River School District • Neil Ross, School District No. 72 • Brian Keliy, School District No. 72 • Carol Westrum • Sylvia Paulson, Public Health Nurse • Ministry of Social Services Staff, Grand Forks, Trail and Castlegar • Boundary Family and Individual Services Society • Women In Need Society, Castlegar • Kootenay Society for Community Living | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Castlegar Community Services • Leigh Harrison • Ron Gray • Sharon Gaetz • Benie Jahbert • Marilyn Fain, Chilliwack Community Services • Neil Long • Mrs. Loewen • Cathy Anderson • Mr. Barter and Rhonda Barter • Chad Kullman • Lynn Town • Marian Leny • Rick Bergen • Michael Clarke • Al Balisky • Dawn Marie Tytherleigh, Single Mothers Against Rough Treatment (S.M.A.R.T.) • Rhonda Keown • Grant Keown • Karen Whittome • Ministry of Social Services Staff, Chilliwack • Bruce McNeil • Kit Kristjanson • Kay Hardy • Ida Creek, Chilliwack Transition House • Wayne and Anita Stan • David Maljaars • Darcy Middleton • Grace Pearson • Claude Cuff • Act 2 Counselling Services • Coquitlam School Board • Youth Innovations and Social Development, Maple Ridge School District • Share Society • Gretchen Zinkin, Cranbrook Elementary School Counsellor • Caroline Shepard, Cranbrook Hospital Public Health Nurse |
|--|--|

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- Dr. Allan Daniels
- Angel Hutton
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Dawson Creek
- Cindy Olsen and Brian Crystal, Northern Lights Community College
- Jenna Kim
- Hazel Plumley, South Peace Resources Society
- David Rosmarnowich
- Cecile Guay
- Rita Bowery
- Hedda Sather, Dawson Creek Foster Parent Association
- Ann Magnusin
- Andy Olson
- David Blaney
- John Klassen
- Keith Hall
- Larry Austman
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Cassiar
- John Wright
- Michelle Jensen
- Pat Edzerza, President Tahltan Tribal Council, Ministry of Education
- Susan Herzog, Fort Nelson Women's Resource Centre
- Lorraine Feredy, Catholic Women's League of Canada
- Wendy Hansel, United Church Minister
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Fort Nelson
- Fort Nelson Child and Youth Committee
- Fort St. John School District Personnel
- Donna Rienhart
- Lynn Thompson
- Fort St. John Alcohol and Drug Abuse Centre
- Fort St. John Special Services
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Hazelton
- Lorraine Mitchell, Reconnect Worker Wet'suwet'en Clan
- Marjorie McKay, Hazelton Child and Youth Committee
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Langley
- Langley Child and Youth Committee
- Langley ICCR Day Program
- Kamloops Youth Company
- Kamloops First Steps Young Moms
- Friends Programs, Kamloops
- Streetbeat Kids, Kamloops
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Kamloops
- Kamloops Legal Services
- Kamloops School District Counsellors
- Kamloops Foster Parent Support Workers
- Young Mom Programs Advocacy Groups, Kamloops
- Probation Services, Kamloops
- Medical Liaison Committee, Jehovah's Witnesses, Kamloops
- Family Law Sub-section, Kamloops
- Sexual Activity and Youth Group, Kamloops
- Wally Gibb
- Bob Clarke, Kamloops Elizabeth Fry Society
- Bob Cornish, Kamloops Youth Resources Society
- Gwen Cutler, Kamloops Sexual Assault Center
- Sarah Thompson Smith, Child Abuse Prevention Program
- Jo Rothenburger, Young Moms Advocacy, Kamloops
- Jerry Withler, Kamloops Social Service Inter-Agency Committee
- Bob Wrenn
- Rick Turner, Kamloops District Teachers' Association
- Doug Kusch
- Gail Cameron, Kamloops Home Support
- Paula McRae, Mayor's Task Force on Children and Youth
- Genevive Ring, Kamloops Pro Life
- David Baxter, Kelowna Family Service Centre Society
- B.C.A.S.W. (Okanagan Branch)
- Terry Dunn, Kelowna Youth and Family Services
- Lucille Kial, Kelowna Women's Centre
- Geord Holland
- Rita Corbet
- Debbie Dickerson-Pogue
- Dr. Brinkerhoff
- Karen Johnson, Maintenance Enforcement Group
- Pam Watland
- Craig Helmstaed, Kelowna Boys and Girls Club
- Cliff Turner
- Rod Barratt
- Vicky Livingstone, Home Educators, Kelowna
- Maria Matara and Erica Norton, Parents' Rights Group, Kelowna
- Joan Kirth
- Chris Rush, Canadian Council on Self-Esteem

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- Greg Bitgood, Kelowna Christian Centre, Real Women Kelowna Chapter
- Susan Leduc
- Merna Hamilton
- Bernice Brown
- Keith Pattinson, Boys and Girls Club of B.C.
- Lillian Lipsie
- Randy Brine
- Michale Saffler
- Terry Elder
- Terry McCarthy, Maple Ridge School Trustee and Youth Offender Worker
- Fern Olsen
- Lisa Johnston
- Donna Hamilton
- Cornell Essells
- Rebecca Burnham
- Gail Sabarski
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Nanaimo and Parksville
- Nanaimo Public Health
- Nanaimo Community Law
- Nanaimo Youth Resources
- Nanaimo Salvation Army
- Family Resource Center, Nanaimo
- Nanaimo Family Life Resource Association
- Resource Enhancement Program, Nanaimo
- S.O.S. Services, Nanaimo
- Nanaimo Parent Association of School and Community Living
- Mary Devries, Nanaimo Foster Parents Association
- Ms. Randy Kocher, Nanaimo School District
- Wendy Jeffrey, Flying Frog Consultants
- Ruth Mornor, foster parent
- Chris Haynes, Ministry of Social Services
- Gary Postma, Concerned Citizens for the Family
- Stewart Tracey and Ross Fraser, Boys and Girls Club of Nanaimo
- Daryl Pinkney
- Pat Patten, Nanaimo Family Life Association
- Dave Bentley
- Catherine Kintoff
- Leslie Campos, BCFFPA
- Mr. P. Tanner
- Phyllis Nash, BCASW
- Heather Moss
- Chris Hopkins
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Nelson
- Life After Birth, Nelson
- Carolyn Moore
- Marilyn Walovick, North Kootenay Lake CSS
- Nelson Group Home
- Nelson Child and Youth Committee
- Nelson School District No. 7, Special Services
- Nelson Right to Life
- Sara Sherk
- Greg Stacey
- Barb Cohen, Justice Committee Family Court
- Joyce Dalms, Independence for Youth Program
- Marilyn and Sam Konkins, Victims of Child Abuse
- Leila Burton, Nelson Advocacy Centre
- Debbie Zebin, Nelson Community Service Centre
- Nancy Ketchum and Laurie Morgan, BC Association of Social Workers
- Miriam Townsend
- Martin Orr
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, New Westminster
- Child and Youth Committee, New Westminster
- Cameray Children's Centre
- Burnaby Family Life
- Odyssey Boys and Girls Club
- Burnaby R.C.M.P.
- Project Parent, Burnaby
- New Westminster Police, High School Liaison
- Family Court Committee, Burnaby
- St. Leonard's Society
- Fraserside
- Mediation Project, Burnaby Family Services
- Detached Youth Program
- Laurie Geschke, Social Justice Committee of Northside Chapel
- Barb Stasuk
- Linda Fletcher-Gordon
- Heather Whiteford
- Mary O'Neill, Fraserside Suicide Prevention Program
- Katherine Limb
- Norma McCurrach
- Michael Bradshaw
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, North Shore, Vancouver
- North Vancouver Boys and Girls Club

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- Family Court and Youth Justice Committee, North Vancouver
- District of West Vancouver
- Arlene Gladstone and Judy Archer, North Shore Family Services
- Eugene Harder
- John Gillis, Grandparents' Rights
- Mac Conidis, Pacific Legal Education Association
- Chris Fuoco, West Vancouver Youth Outreach Program
- Alysa Golden, student of social work
- Linda Gallen
- Peter Jensen
- Rosemary Hundal, foster parent
- Barbara Kinniburgh, foster parent
- Alfredo Sepulveda, Multicultural Society
- Penticton and District Community Resource Society
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Port Alberni
- Port Alberni Foster Parent Association
- Port Alberni R.C.M.P.
- Home Support Society of Port Alberni
- John MacDonald
- Jennifer Hastie, Port Alberni Family Guidance
- Gertie Franz, Port Alberni Friendship Centre
- Laurel Lenormand, Port Alberni Women's Resources Society
- Margaret McGarry, Port Alberni Child Care Planning Committee
- Janet Anker, Early Childhood Education
- Mr. S. Bruun
- Mary Heatherington, Port Alberni Health Outreach Association
- Sally Hodgson, Planned Parenthood
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Powell River
- Powell River Foster Parent Association
- Powell River Child and Youth Committee
- Special Needs Day Care Coordinator, Powell River
- Powell River Community Services
- Powell River Sexual Abuse Intervention Program
- Powell River Probation Services
- Cheryl Sproule
- Powell River Pro-Life Group
- Liz Kellough
- Prince George Youth Containment Centre Staff
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Prince George
- Residential Resource Management Committee, Prince George
- Child Development Centre, Prince George
- Correspondence School, Prince George
- Medical Liaison Committee, Jehovah Witnesses
- Christian Ministerial Association, Prince George
- Northern Native Family Services, Prince George
- Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Services Society, Prince George
- Child and Youth Committee, Prince George
- Marilyn Schiereu
- Roger Woolkee, Prince George Receiving Home
- Cheryl Grenon
- Mike Shenk
- Leslie Goerstzen
- Georgie Melatini, Child and Youth Care Association
- Stan Dyck, Inter Agency Child Abuse Committee, Prince George
- Chris Leischer, Children's Foundation, Prince George
- Diane Yachamira, Youth Counsellor
- Olive Goodwin, B.C.A.S.W.
- Jean Gordon, foster parent
- Carol Fraser
- Verna Cobrun
- Terrill Welch, Project Parent North
- Legal Services Society, Prince Rupert
- Prince Rupert School District
- Probation and Family Court Services, Prince Rupert
- Salvation Army, Prince Rupert
- Skeena Health Unit
- Prince Rupert R.C.M.P.
- Prince Rupert Home Support Association
- Prince Rupert RECONNECT
- Dorothy Graham, Prince Rupert Mental Health
- Jennifer Ellis, Skeena Health
- Shirley Duchsherer, Infant Development Program
- Janet Ogden, North Coast Victim Support Services
- Native Court Worker
- North Coast Tribal Council
- Prince Rupert Hospital, Chief of Staff
- Marina Kan
- Community Enrichment Society, Prince Rupert
- Randy and Virginia Jans, JANS Receiving Home
- Eileen Richards, KAIEN Receiving Home
- Randy Jans, BCFFPA Prince Rupert

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- ORCA Place Group Home
- Queen Charlotte Islands Health Care Society
- Astrid Egger, Old Masset Group Home
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Queen Charlotte City
- Queen Charlotte City School Board
- Ministry of Social Services Staff
- Project Start, Quesnel
- Child Development Centre, Quesnel
- Home Support Services, Quesnel
- Quesnel School District
- Quesnel Youth Alternative Society
- Child Abuse Coordinator for Mental Health, Quesnel
- Quesnel Health Unit
- George McGowan, Quesnel Special Services
- Sharon Hurd-Romanell, Quesnel Transition House
- Carol Richard
- Kathy Pugh
- Catharina Gavene
- Sandy Brunton
- John Simpson
- Ruth Schooler
- Kathleen Robertson
- Sharon Primeau
- Lynn Worden
- Vancouver Incest and Sexual Abuse Centre
- Richmond Youth Services Agency
- Richmond Child Protection Network
- Richmond Emergency Care Society
- Richmond Foster Parent Association
- SOS Children's Village Society, Richmond
- Richmond School District
- Allan Parker, Richmond Family Court Committee
- Michael McCoy, Touchstone Family Association
- Jennifer Wade
- Maxine Wilson
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Salmon Arm and Revelstoke
- Smithers Sexual Abuse Committee
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Smithers
- Dzel Kant Friendship Centre Society
- BVLDT Teenage Receiving Home, Smithers
- Ministry of Women's Equality, Smithers
- Another Alternative Street Program, Smithers
- Wedzen Kwe Community Law Office
- B.C. Association of Social Workers, Smithers
- Smithers Foster Parents Association
- Passage Transition Home, Smithers
- Betty McClurg, Langley Family Services
- Susan Broadfoot, Surrey/White Rock Mediation Centre
- David Knight
- Dr. Zarina Moszheb
- Cathy Stakehold
- Linda Jackson
- Allan Cilman
- Linda Marcotte, Surrey Child Poverty Committee
- Melody Hildebrandt
- Helga Kreig
- Lex Reynolds, Child and Youth Association of B.C.
- Nancy Woodbridge, Canadian Grandparents Association
- John Gillis
- Roger Dineson
- Mohinder Kang, Progressive Indo-Canadian Society
- Peggy Stacey, Real Women of B.C.
- Scott Bernett
- Lawrence Birdsall, Nisha Family and Children Services Society
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Surrey
- B.C. Block Parents
- Terry Eissfeldt
- Les Schebert
- Fay Hodgson
- Norma Quashie, foster parent
- Julie Clendenning
- Robert Young
- Nick Desego
- Michael McCoy
- Terrace Transition House
- Terrace R.C.M.P.
- Kari Simpson, Citizens' Research Institute, Vancouver
- Terrace Anti-poverty Group
- Terrace and District Community Service Society
- Terrace Family Court and Youth Justice Committee
- Terrace Christian Fellowship
- Terrace School District
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Vancouver
- Federation of Independent School Association, Vancouver
- Justice Institute of British Columbia

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Margaret Johnston, B.C. Civil Liberties Association
- Michelle Charpentier
- Richard Sullivan, Social Work Program, University of BC
- Bonnie Agnew, Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
- Frank Helden
- Marilyn Howitt, Learning Disabilities Association, Vancouver
- Suzanne Trolland, Pediatric Registered Nurse
- Tracy Moore
- Andy Wachtel, Research Services, United Way
- Roberta McIntosh
- Jerry Steinberg, Air Space (Non-smokers Rights)
- Robert Quicke
- Red Cross Child Abuse Prevention Program
- Medical Liaison Committee of Jehovah's Witnesses
- Young Parents Y.W.C.A.
- Children's Hospital, Vancouver
- George Coyne
- Geraldine Glattstein
- John Tee, Pacific Children's Shelter Society
- Nancy Drewitt
- Bruce Cooke-Dallin, West Coast Prep
- Jade McLaren
- Mane Shields
- Stephanie Chaytor, Wife Assault Coordinating Committee
- Regina Scholte, Adult Survivors of Foster Care
- Ron Pound, B.C. School Counsellors Association
- Donella Oliver
- Esa Campbell
- Gerald Culhane, Grandparents' Rights
- Shashi Assanand, Multicultural Association, Vancouver
- Bill McFarland, Elizabeth Fry Society
- Lillian To, Family Counselling With Chinese
- Sunnyhill Hospital, Vancouver
- Student Services, Vancouver School Board
- First United Church, Vancouver
- Burnaby School Board
- Dr. Sydney Segal
- Marilyn Hogan, Infant Feeding Crisis Project
- Ian Maas, Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- Jonathan Evans
- Mrs. Merlet, Ethnic Women's Group
- Mariam Stucki
- Cecelia Von Dehn, Nurses' Group
- Erika Bell-Lowther, Director of Social Planning, District of North Vancouver
- Lynn Kent, Asian Youth Task Force
- Cheryl Lester
- Margaret Ennenberg, End Legislated Poverty
- Henry Vluc
- Margo Brown
- Valerie Aelbers
- Harry Rankin, Councillor, City of Vancouver
- Marjorie Gans, Teacher of Learning Disabled Children
- Irene Schmidt, Child Poverty Action Committee
- Antonia Corbey
- East Vancouver Community Services
- Family Support Institute, Vancouver
- Monroe House, Vancouver
- St. James Social Services
- The Student Centre, Vancouver
- Nisha Society, Vancouver
- Club Metro Youth Centre, Burnaby
- Powell Place Emergency Shelter, Vancouver
- Ministry of Social Services, After Hours Staff
- Vancouver Family Lawyers: Ruth Hamilton, Tony Allen, Wayne Robertson, Jessica Gossen and Robin Stewart
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Office of the Superintendent and Inspection and Standards Unit
- Vancouver Judges: Her Honour Judge Jane Auxier, His Honour Judge Philip Collings and His Honour Judge Thomas Gove
- Greater Vancouver Employment Strategy Society
- Minister's Staff Advisory Committee on Multiculturalism
- Canadian Bar, Family Law Sub-section
- B.C. Council for the Family
- Registered Nurses Association of BC
- B.C. Adoption Network
- Gerry McHale, Mediation Project, Ministry of Attorney General
- Marie McDonald
- B.C. Association of Social Workers
- Society for Children and Youth
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Ministry of Social Services, Adoption Section
- Federation of Child and Family Services
- City of Vancouver
- Brigitte Kitchen, York University, Toronto

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Child and Youth Mental Health Services, Vancouver
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Victoria Region
- Institute for Dispute Resolution, Victoria
- Victoria Sexual Abuse Society
- Coastal Community Youth Services, Victoria
- Together Against Poverty, Victoria
- Blanshard Elementary School, Victoria
- YM-YWCA Young Moms' Group, Victoria
- Parents Together, Victoria
- Marg Mouat, Family Section, Canadian Bar Association
- His Worship, Mayor David Turner, City of Victoria
- Cindy McLaren, Child Poverty Action Committee
- Jim McBurney
- Barb Fields, B.C. Association of Social Workers
- Peter Clarke, foster parent
- Kathleen Toth
- Derrick Thompson
- Andrew Armitage, School of Social Work, UVic
- Brian Wharf and John Cassom, School of Social Work, UVic
- Gareth Davies
- Gerald Stanford
- Ms. Robin Pike, Fernwood House Society
- Grant Dinnadge
- Joy Illington, Office of the Ombudsman
- Marg Kennett, Gordon Head Community Action Committee
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Vanderhoof
- Vanderhoof Public Health and Mental Health
- Vanderhoof School District
- Nechako Valley Community Services
- North Okanagan Youth and Family Services
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Vernon
- Communities Against Sexual Abuse
- Vernon Social Planning Council
- Vernon Friendship Centre
- Vernon R.C.M.P.
- Vernon Women's Centre
- Armstrong/Spallumcheen Community Service Centre
- Vernon Teachers' Association
- Vernon Child and Youth Committee
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Williams Lake
- Cariboo Adoption Support Group
- Teen-Parent Mediation Program, Williams Lake
- Wife Assault Coordinator, Williams Lake
- Crisis and Counselling Centre, Williams Lake
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Williams Lake
- Probation Services, Williams Lake
- Peter Northcott
- His Honour Judge Terry Shupe
- Citizens' Research Institute
- B.C. Health Association
- B.C. Association for Community Living
- B.C. Planned Parenthood
- TRIAD Society for Truth in Adoption
- Hope Adoption Agency
- B.C. Youth Council
- S.P.A.R.C. of B.C.
- Federated Anti-poverty Groups of B.C.
- End Legislated Poverty
- B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations
- Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver
- Adoptive Parents Association of B.C.
- Office of the Public Trustee
- Infant Development Program of B.C.
- B.C. Women's Institute
- B.C. Parents in Crisis
- B.C. Parents in Crisis, Victoria Branch
- Dr. A. Solnit

Written Submissions to the Community Panel

- P. Nachbaur, Nelson Right to Life Society
- D.M. Tytherleigh, S.M.A.R.T., Chilliwack
- Len van der Meer, Cranbrook Boys and Girls Club
- Community Action Centre, Cranbrook
- Sandra Cacchioni, Women in Need Society, Castlegar
- Nelson Community Services Centre
- Keith Pattinson and Alysa Golden, Neighbours Together, North Vancouver
- St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services, Burnaby
- Keith Pattinson, Boys and Girls Clubs of B.C. Pacific Region
- Margaret Mitchell and Barbara Davies, Federated Anti-poverty Groups, Vancouver
- Howard Exley
- Laurie Geschke and Helen McCaskill, Social Justice Committee, Burnaby
- The Pacific Legal Education Association
- Lynn Mace, Fernie Women's Centre
- Karen Johnson, Maintenance Enforcement Group, Kelowna
- Betty McClurg, Langley Family Services
- Act 2 Counselling Program No. 2
- Parents Together Program, Surrey, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vancouver
- John P. Grogan, Grogan's Slogans and Souvenir Services, Valemount
- Betty Davis, Langley Foster Parent Association
- Jacqueline Maire, E.T.H.I.C., New Westminster
- Robert Sessford, The Salvation Army
- Lynda Fletcher-Gordon, The Lower Mainland Purpose Society for Youth and Families, New Westminster
- David Jones, The Kootenay Society for Community Living, Castlegar
- Shane Picken, ARC Programs Ltd., Westbank
- Citizens Research Institute, Langley
- Stewart R. Tracey and Ross P. Fraser, Boys and Girls Club of Nanaimo
- Cindy McLaren, Child Poverty Action Committee, Victoria
- Paul Holmes, Independent Order of Foresters, Burnaby
- Ms. Val Ahlila, Citizens Against Child Exploitation (CACE)
- Gillian Wilson, The Salvation Army - Wiseman House, Nanaimo
- Patricia Patton, Nanaimo Family Life Association
- Audrey Scammel, TRIAD - Victoria
- Nanaimo Community Assistance Society, Community Law Program
- Marco da Costa, Family Civil Liberties Group, Whitehorse
- Wendy Jeffery, Flying Frog Consultants, Nanose Bay
- Mary de Vries, Nanaimo Foster Parent Association
- Sheila Davis, Nanaimo Foster Parent Association
- Peg Peters and Board Members, Victoria Child Sexual Abuse Society
- Irene Champagne, School District No. 69, Qualicum, Family Resource Association, Qualicum
- Kevin Campbell, Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan
- CRD (South Vancouver Island) Regional Child and Youth Committee
- Lucille Kyle, Women's Resource Centre
- The Canadian Council for Self Esteem, Vernon
- S. Smintich, Children and Parents' Guard Association of Toronto
- Martin Harris and Mavis Holm, Peace Arch Community Services, White Rock
- Doug Sabourin, Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver
- Mary MacLachlan, Nanaimo Neurological and Cerebral Palsy Association
- Giant Steps West Therapeutic Society, Kamloops
- Craig Hjelmstad, Kelowna and District Boys and girls Club
- The Capital Regional District Regional Child and Youth Committee, Victoria
- T. Dunn, Kelowna Youth and Family Services
- Al Fraser, Agassiz C.Y.C.
- Evelyn Ruddy, Red Cross Child Abuse Prevention Program for Adolescents
- Betty MacPhee, YWCA Crabtree Corner, Vancouver
- Canadian Grandparents' Rights Association
- Lynn Fairall, United Way of the Fraser Valley, Aldergrove
- Bonnie Agnew, Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
- Ron MacIsaac, Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition, Victoria
- Josie Chuback and Gary Manson, Recreation Services, Maple Ridge

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Youth Link, BCRPA Coordinator, Burnaby
- Nisha Family and Children's Services Society, Burnaby
- Lorraine Faherty, The Catholic Women's League of Canada, Fort Nelson
- Youth Link, BCRPA, Vancouver
- Edna Ashcroft and Paul Jenkinson, Mission Community Service Society
- Margaret Johnson, B.C. Civil Liberties Association, Vancouver
- Andy Wachtel, Research Associate, United Way of the Lower Mainland
- Jerry Steinberg, Airspace Non-smokers Rights Society
- Ann Deatherage, Creston Child and Youth Committee
- Simon Trevelyan, SPARC - Society Planning and Research Council of B.C.
- Tina Helgason, Kamloops Home Support Services Association
- End Legislated Poverty, Vancouver
- Cecilia Von Dehn, Concerned Nurses for Patients Rights - Informed Consent-ethics
- Jane Holland, Family Support Institute
- Lisa Godin-LeBlanc, Skeena Family Resources, Terrace
- Sandra Henson, Penticton and District Community Resources Society
- Kamloops Young Mothers Advocacy Committee
- Donald Beard, Medical Liaison Committee Coordinator for Jehovah's Witnesses, Kamloops
- William Kason, Robert McBeath and Terry Coventry, Medical Liaison Committee for Jehovah's Witnesses, Prince George
- Judy Gould and Lisa Volts, Nechako Valley Community Services Society
- S.J. Dyck, Inter-Agency Child Abuse Committee
- Georgine Melatini, Child and Youth Committee, Prince George
- Prince George Ministerial Association
- Sarah Thompson-Smith, (CAPPA) Red Cross Child Abuse Prevention Program
- Lisa Allgaier, Bob Cornish and Gerri Withler, Social Action Information and Networking Team, Kamloops
- Bernice Korzenoski, Family and Youth Resources Society, Revelstoke
- Roxanne Hughes and Tom Hetherington, NISHA Family and Children's Services Society, Burnaby
- Linda Marcotte, Surrey Child Poverty Committee
- JoAnne Blackman, Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, Nanaimo
- Richard L. Ryan, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vancouver
- Joanne Hagstrom, Wendy Jalbert, Susann Mongrain and Monique Bouchard, Community Support Services Advisory Council, Cariboo Chilcotin
- Mary Lee Best, Chandra Sen and Ray Chapman, Act 2 Counselling, Coquitlam
- Richmond Child Protection Network
- SOS Children's Village Society, Richmond
- H. Bandsmer, Central Heights Church, Abbotsford
- Barbara Dante, Nelson and District Home Support Services
- Hazelton Child and Youth Committee
- Susan Davenport, Missing Pieces Through Adoption, Langley
- Josie Mackey, Prince Rupert Home Support Association
- Terrace Anti-poverty Group Society
- Leslie McCaulay, Terrace Transition House
- Shirley Hewat, Cariboo-Chilcotin Child Development Centre, Williams Lake
- Tracy R. Moore, B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities, Vancouver
- Marg Herman, Single Parent Resource Centre, Victoria
- Donna Rinehart, ABC Day Care, Fort St. John
- Jean McCutcheon, Vancouver District Parent Representative, Vancouver School Board
- Karen Shillington, Coordinator, The Association for Better Communities, Nanaimo
- Lois Lindsay, Vancouver Branch of the Ortho Dyslexia Society
- Patricia Foodikoff, Learning Disabilities Association of B.C., Surrey
- Heather Kay, Victoria Early Pregnancy Coalition
- Audrey Scammell, TRIAD Society, Victoria
- Anne Magnusin, Legal Services Society, Fort St. John
- Brian Davison, Crescent Beach Community Services
- Paul Gurr, Comox Valley Regional Campus, North Island College, Courtenay
- Jessie Scott, Comox Valley Life Association, Courtenay
- Port Alberni Women's Resources Society
- Ann McLean, Canadian Bar Association, Victoria
- Tami Lundy, B.C. Council for the Family, Vancouver
- Dr. Arthur Fallick, Greater Vancouver Employment Strategy Society (GVESS)

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Barbara Hestrin, Planned Parenthood Association of B.C., Vancouver
- Federation of Child and Family Services of B.C., Victoria
- Harold Carson and Paul Wiltse, Powell River Child and Youth Committee
- Mothers, Colwood/Langford Parents in Crisis Group
- Powell River Prolife
- Fay de la Rue Browne, Hilton Centre Port Alberni Association for Children with Development Disabilities
- Jessie Scott, Comox Valley Family Life Association
- Esther Lowe, Powell River Foster Parents Association
- Frank Behrens, Campbell River Family Services
- Michelle Thomhill, Powell River Sexual Abuse Intervention Program
- Margaret McGarry, Port Alberni Child Care Planning Committee
- Sally Hodgson, Planned Parenthood of Port Alberni
- Family Health Centre, Port Alberni
- Jennifer Hastie, Port Alberni Family Guidance Association
- Trudy Denton, Adoptive Parents Association of B.C., Surrey
- The Advocacy Centre, Nelson
- Shukrieh Merlet, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in B.C., White Rock
- Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation, The Timothy Christian School, Chilliwack
- Esther Frid, Latin American Community Council, Vancouver
- Special Services Division Staff, Port Alberni Home Support Association
- Kathleen Higgins, Westcoast Women for Family Life, Delta
- Sarah Jepson and Malerie Meeker, Powell River Association for Community Living
- Sue Banton, Port Alberni Foster Parents Association
- Rita Markland, International Social Service, Canada
- Joan Wenstob, B.C. Federation of Foster Parents
- Audrey Scammell, TRIAD, Victoria
- Adoptive Parents Association of B.C., Surrey
- Ann Welwood, Hope Pregnancy and Adoption Services Society, Abbotsford
- Ann Welwood, B.C. Adoption Network, Abbotsford
- Jane Holland, Family Support Institute, Vancouver
- Brigitte Kitchen and Andrew Mitchell, Child Poverty Action Group, Toronto
- B.C. Youth Council
- Nancy Drewitt and Ajax Quimby, YWCA - Custody and Access Group House, Vancouver
- Colin Ensworth, North Vancouver Child and Youth Care Committee
- B.C. Women's Institute
- Society for Children and Youth B.C., Vancouver
- Susan Munro, Boys and Girls Club of B.C., Pacific Region, Vancouver
- B.C. Health Association, Vancouver
- Joyce Branscombe, Early Childhood Educators of B.C., Vancouver
- Sandra McConnell, Association of Family Serving Agencies, Victoria
- Judith Kerr, Victoria Women's Transition House
- Patricia Tennant, Attention Deficit Disorder Support Association, New Westminster
- Shirley Wiebe, Career Vocational Assessment, Prince George
- Michael Goldberg, SPARC of B.C., Vancouver
- Mel Gill, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa - Carleton
- Jean-Anne Copley, McDuff, McBuff, and McBean Day Care, Kelowna
- Jeanette Hermes, West Coast Leaf Association, Vancouver
- Anita Olsen, Immigrant and Visible Women Minority Women of B.C., Vancouver
- Ruth Bancroft, Vancouver Special Needs Support Services Committee
- Lana McQuarrie, Child Development Centre, Prince George
- Rod Johnston, Director of Instruction Special Services School District No. 7, Nelson
- Unidentified
- Jack MacDonald, U.B.C. School of Social Work
- Jill Hannon, School District No. 42, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows
- Randi Kocher, School District No. 68, Nanaimo
- David Turner and Max Uhlemann, School of Social Work, UVic
- S.R. Ladyman, School District No. 15, Penticton
- Sandra Griffin and Linda McDonnell, Early Childhood Educators of B.C., Vancouver
- Brian Wharf, Faculty of Human and Social Development, UVic
- Marilyn Callahan, School of Social Work, UVic
- Marilyn Callahan and Carolyn Attridge, UVic
- Vancouver School Board
- Richard Sullivan, UBC School of Social Work

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Marie MacDonald, Vancouver Community College
- Ron Pound, B.C. School Counsellors Association
- Lois Saad and Richard Dopson, The Study Centre, Vancouver
- Olaf Rostad, School District No. 41, Burnaby
- F. Herbst, The Federation of Independent School Associations, Vancouver
- Rick Turner and Jane Powell, Kamloops District Teachers' Association
- Ross Spina, School District No. 24, Kamloops
- Bernice Dewick, The Executive of the B.C. School Counsellors Association, Quesnel
- Denise Goodkey, Central Interior Regional Correspondence School
- Charlene Seguin, School District No. 56, Vanderhoof
- Quesnel School District
- Susan M. Duncan and Karen E. Abbott, University College of the Cariboo
- Rick Turner, Kamloops District Teachers' Association
- Ross C. Spina, School District No. 24, Kamloops
- Val Gillis and Ingrid Meally, Ashcroft Region School Counsellors
- Kathleen Scales, Area Counsellors, Richmond School District
- Peter Northcott, Prince Rupert District Teachers' Union
- Andrew Scruton, Director of Instruction (Special Services) School District No. 88, Terrace
- Greg Martin, Chairman of Education Committee, School District No. 50, Queen Charlotte
- Michelle LeBaron Duryea, UVic Institute for Dispute Resolutions, Victoria
- Alan J.H. Newberry, B.C. School Trustees' Association, Vancouver
- Judith Blakeston, B.C. Teachers Federation, Vancouver
- Ken Novakowski, B.C. Teachers Federation, Vancouver
- J.J. Rantanen, School District No. 38, Richmond, Superintendent of Schools
- Sydney Segal, Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics, U.B.C.
- Julie Spencer and Janet Anker, Early Childhood Educators of B.C., Port Alberni Branch
- Jean Moore, Board of School Trustees of School District No. 39, Vancouver
- B.C. Teachers Federation, Vancouver
- Richard Sullivan, U.B.C. School of Social Work, Vancouver
- Sheri Sheremeto
- Pat Webb, Trail
- Marion Lennea
- Dan Rubin
- Rosemary Hundal, North Vancouver
- Alyssa Golden
- Joanne MacDonald, North Vancouver
- Unidentified
- Cathy Liddle, North Vancouver
- Barbara Kinniburgh, North Vancouver
- Gurnail Tiwana, Surrey
- Barbara Stasuk, Burnaby
- Mary O'Neill, Fraserside
- Pattie Wallace, Delta
- John A. Nesling, Cortes Island
- S. Dick
- Micki Ewert, Langley
- Bonita Hurley, Richmond
- Mary Brooke, Victoria
- Vic Belknap, Victoria
- Gertrude Larmer, Delta
- Gail J. Sabanski, Maple Ridge
- Richard Stock, Clearbrook
- Margrethe Wolezduk, Nanaimo
- Inez Smith, Langley
- J. Barker, Union Bay
- Kathleen Bayliss, Kelowna
- Bernice Browne, Port Hardy
- Joan Chitto, Surrey
- Wendy G. Dyson, Port Coquitlam
- Sue Wersmiller, Westbank
- Kathryn Veal, Langley
- David Struthers, Families in Trouble Referral Program Committee
- Concerned Citizen, Nelson
- Jetly Hiet, Surrey
- Heather Lederis, Victoria
- Richard C. Weldon, Surrey
- William H. Tatum, Surrey
- Leslie Schubert, Cloverdale
- Henry C. Pollard, Vernon
- Katherine Tomczu, School and Family Counsellor, Naramata
- Gloria Franz, Ladysmith
- Kathleen M. Toth, Victoria
- Joanne Burgess, Victoria

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Jim McBurney, Victoria
- Gloria Harris, Victoria
- Eugene P. Harder, North Vancouver
- Riley Hern, Victoria
- Lois and Peter Clark, Victoria
- Unidentified
- D. Charmley, Nanaimo
- S.H. Booiman, White Rock
- Julia Bradford, Vernon
- Gail Elgaard, Penticton
- Cliff G. Turner, Peachland
- David Bentley, Nanaimo
- Audrey Holmgren
- Don V. Clarkson, Fulford Harbour
- Dorothy Livingston, Together Against Poverty
- Shelagh Lytle
- Ruth Merner, Nanaimo
- Scott Burnett, Surrey
- David Knight, Surrey
- Dot Nakahara, Ladysmith
- Bette D. Pepper, National Council of Women, Clearbrook
- Diane Robertson, Child Support Worker, Central Valley Transition House, Mission
- Anne D. Johnson
- Cecile Guay, Branching Out
- Kitty Peacock, Port Coquitlam
- Janice Butterfield
- Marilyn Middlemass, Social Planner and Research Assistant, West Vancouver
- Monica Turner Nasmath, Monny's Childcare Service, Victoria
- Meagan Berlis, Westbank
- Sylvia Lloyd, Langley
- Douglas Janes, Vancouver
- Helen Hughes, City Councillor, Victoria
- Sheila Vickery, Victoria
- David Struthers
- Margo Brown
- Carolyn Everett, North Burnaby
- Mary Matera, Kelowna
- Douglas J. Carnahan, Vancouver
- Eve Heath, North Vancouver
- Allana Parkes, Vancouver
- Unidentified
- Barbara Selwood, Vancouver
- Ken Evans, Burnaby
- A. Stoutjesdyk, Chilliwack
- Bill McFarland
- J. Campbell, Abbotsford
- Dale Harris
- Diana Sandberg, Burnaby
- Raymond Kollin, Abbotsford
- Unidentified
- Robert R. Quicke, Vancouver
- Debra S. Nealy, Duncan
- D.M. Goodwin, Victoria
- George Coyne, Vancouver
- Janet Cutler, Duncan
- Ruth Merner, Nanaimo
- Theo R.J. Koehoom, Abbotsford
- Shirley Smith, Vancouver
- Terry Elder, Clearbrook
- Verna MacDonald, Cedar
- Peter Clugston
- Bill and Jacquie Lowndes, Quesnel
- Leslie Goertzen, Vanderhoof
- Robert J. Wren
- Unidentified
- Glen Grant, Williams Lake
- Bernie Jalbert, Sardis
- Leona Madland, Clearbrook
- Margaret Boileau, Grandparents' Rights Association, Burnaby
- Alan Gilman, Surrey
- Faye Wall, Abbotsford
- Lesley Davidson, Kamloops
- Michelle York, Langley
- John Merz, Mission
- Pat and Randall Dering, Vanderhoof
- Hilda Dahl, Victoria
- Tina Helgason, Carol Leeuw and Shirley Cranage
- Unidentified, Williams Lake
- Unidentified
- Bill McFarland
- Vaughan Evans, Vancouver
- Dean Bergstrom, Queen Charlotte City
- Ken and Carol Bordin, Richmond
- Beverly Adams
- Rosemary Leavitt, B.C. Parents in Crisis
- Bernice Browne, Port Moody

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Dianne Critchley, Kamloops
- Lewis and Dawn Hill, Abbotsford
- Kit Kristjanson
- Terrill Welch, Project Parent North, Prince George
- Joyce Peters, Aldergrove
- Lynn Town, Sardis
- Herman Reinitz, Dawson Creek
- Conchita Espelimbargo, Vancouver
- Ivan Carlson
- Verna Coburn, Prince George
- Mr. and Mrs. R. Burchill, Prince George
- Leona French, 70 Mile House
- Dawn Fuller, Chilliwack
- Foster Parents
- Brian G. Waddington, Coquitlam
- Karen E. Watson, Coquitlam
- Jake Friesen, Abbotsford
- Douglas McRae, Williams Lake
- Pearl Durham, Vernon
- Marilyn Schierer
- Mary Whiteman, Mission
- Jean Shenk, Vanderhoof
- Christine Peters, Tatla Lake
- Diane French, Williams Lake
- Doug Ho
- David Blaney, Fort St. John
- Bernard Jefftoght, Chilliwack
- Jane Elise Parlee, Coquitlam
- Roger Tonkin, Vancouver
- Richard Peters, Chilliwack
- Freda Peters, Chilliwack
- Unidentified
- Alan Davidson, Fulford Harbour
- Karen Dullea, Vanderhoof
- Joanne Wiens, Cranbrook
- Pam Mitchell, Victoria
- Karen Wallace, Vanderhoof
- Unidentified
- R.G. and J.H. Weismiller, Surrey
- Cheryl Mathew, Powell River
- Rhonda and Bill Holcombe, Port Alberni
- Judy Schan, Port Alberni
- Steinar Bruun, Port Alberni
- Mary Lou Moore, Powell River
- Mary Rempel, Abbotsford
- Cathy Robertson
- Maryanne Campeau, Sooke
- Nola Klempu
- Ray Konrad, Burnaby
- Rene and Glenda Brunelle, Vernon
- James W. Eckert, Hagensborg
- Denise McInnes, Nanaimo
- Tonia Howell, Kamloops
- Milly Saville, Prince George
- Kristin Ronse, Powell River
- Michelle and Herman Wilbrink, Sardis
- Denyse Parizeau, Victoria
- Jeff Clark
- Gloria Onley, Society for Children's Rights to Adequate Parental Support, Vancouver
- Caroline Westrum, Port McNeil
- Elizabeth Chalmers, West Vancouver
- Val Brugge, Parksville
- Linda Kropf, Vanderhoof
- Nettie Neudorf, Sardis
- L.J. Klassen, Abbotsford
- Unidentified, Campbell River
- Tanya Ngugen, Burnaby
- Ethel-Lynn Gordon, Prince George
- Jean Gordon, Prince George
- S. Rudolph
- Dawn Warawa, Yarrow
- Sandy Luedtke, Burnaby
- Unidentified, Nelson
- Unidentified, Cranbrook
- Frank S. Morris, North Vancouver Family Court and Youth Justice Committee
- Yvonne Cocke, Family Court Youth Justice Committee, New Westminster
- Group of concerned parents, Duncan
- Unidentified
- Unidentified
- Unidentified
- Unidentified
- Patricia Carpenter, Malaspina College
- Dorothy McNaughton, Sunny Hill Hospital
- Unidentified, McBride
- Unidentified
- Linda Bretfeld, Terrace Family Court and Youth Justice Committee

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- Children's Aid Society for the Districts of Sudbury and Manitoulin, Ontario
- Vancouver Family Court Youth Justice Committee
- Adoptees - Birthparent Support Network of Washington, D.C.
- Richard Roberts, Praxis, Inc., Calgary
- Nelson Family Court and Youth Justice Committee
- Unidentified
- Federal, Provincial and Territorial Family Law Committee, Ottawa
- Petition
- Task Force on Child Care Committee, Victoria
- Central Vancouver Island Health Unit, Nanaimo
- Nanaimo Public Health Nurses
- Patrick Konkin, Mental Health, Nanaimo
- Ann St. James, CATC 2 MATC, Ministry of Health, Burnaby
- Kathy Whitehead and Joyce Scott, Duncan Community Health Nurses
- Dr. Jean Hlady, Director, Child Protection Service, B.C. Children's Hospital
- Larry Aristman, Peace River Health Unit, Dawson Creek
- Erica Bell-Lowther, District of North Vancouver
- Report of Federal and Provincial Territorial Family Law Committee, Ministry of Attorney General
- Pam Moore, Chilliwack Public Health Nurse
- Judy Rodgers, Social Planning, City of Vancouver
- Sandi Witherspoon, REACH Community Health Centre, Vancouver
- Drew Perry, Manitoba Family Services, Winnipeg
- Lynne Kent and Paul Czernie, Asian Youth Task Force, Vancouver
- Public Health and Mental Health Home Care, Office Support Staff
- Mary Gradnitzer and Staff, Cariboo Health Unit, Quesnel
- Mayor's Task Force on Children and Youth, Kamloops
- Bennett Dufour, Prince Rupert Mental Health Centre
- Eileen Kosier, Cariboo Health Unit, Quesnel
- Pat Cutshall, R.N., Registered Nurses' Association of B.C., Vancouver
- Renee Liddicoat and Mary Lea Penrose, Northern Interior Public Health Nurses, Prince George
- City of Vancouver
- Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee on Mental Health, Victoria
- Jerry McHale, Ministry of Attorney General, Victoria
- Canadian Mental Health Association, B.C. Division
- Gail Gustafson, Canadian Mental Health Association, Williams Lake
- Sylvia Paulson, Donna McNeil and Linda Carlson, Campbell River Health Unit Community
- Judith Phanidis, Greater Vancouver Mental Health Service Society
- Heather Mass, Nursing Policy Consultant, Policy Development Department, Registered Nurses' Association of B.C., Vancouver
- Social Planning Department, City of Vancouver
- Nora Curry, Social Planning, City of Victoria
- Terry Russell, Child and Youth Mental Health Services, Ministry of Health, Victoria
- Marc Lavertu and Paul Wiltse, Powell River Probation Office
- Greg R. Stacey, Stacey, Wallach Barristers and Solicitors, Nelson
- Richard Goluboff and W. Gerald Mazzci, Goluboff and Mazzci, Barristers and Solicitors, West Vancouver
- Chris Bowers, CHIMO Personal Distress Intervention Service, Richmond
- Dr. W.D. Gutowski, Chilliwack
- Dave Nordstrom, Home Base Counselling Service, Victoria
- George Coyne, Family Counsellor, Vancouver
- Geord Holland, Weddell, Horn and Co., Barristers and Solicitors, Kelowna
- Dustine Tucker, B.C.A.S.W., Okanagan Branch
- Dr. Phillip Ney, Victoria
- Larry W. Waterman, Psychological and Counselling Service, Nanaimo
- Deryk Thompson, Sidney
- Karen Ledger, Mental Health Consultant, Victoria
- Barbara Field, B.C.A.S.W., Victoria
- Boyd F. Hiltz, Barrister and Solicitor, Duncan
- Myrna Tracy, Victoria
- Janna Francis and Richard Dopson, Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society
- Brian Cristall, Psychologist
- Rod Barrett
- Rev. John F. Klassen, Pastor, Northgate Mennonite Brethren Marriage, Dawson Creek
- Al Howard, Family Court Counsellor, Fraser Region
- Susan Mackey-Jamieson, B.C. Psychological Association, Vancouver
- Dawn Fuller, Registered Clinical Counsellor, Chilliwack
- Roberta H. Doree, Special Education Teacher, Kamloops

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Stuart J. Alcock, Vancouver
- Andrew Armitage, School of Social Work, UVic
- Jane Cassie, Consulting Pediatrician, Chilliwack
- Jeffrey Dinsdale, Professional Counselling Resources, Parents and Adolescents Coming Together
- Carol Oakley and Ingrid Meally, Quesnel Youth Alternatives Society
- Carol Reiter, Wellspring Counselling Service
- Doug Bruno, School Counsellor
- Val Gillis, School Counsellor
- Gareth J. Davis, Lawyer, Victoria
- Christopher Montoya, Psychologist, University College of the Cariboo
- Doug Foster, College Instructor, Terrace
- Dr. John Blatherwick, Board of Health, Vancouver
- Danica Djordjevich, Articling Student Lawyer, Williams Lake
- Donovan Hill, Lawyer, Surrey
- Jack McDonald and Jim Campbell, School of Social Work, U.B.C.
- Laurie D. Morgan, B.C. Association of Social Workers, Vancouver
- Rita Corbett, Public Health, Kelowna
- John Bowen, Axess Research Group, Vancouver
- Kathleen Kendall, Legal Services Society of B.C., Vancouver
- Stuart Alcock, Executive Director, B.C. Association of Social Workers
- David Cruikshank, Director of Continuing Legal Education, Vancouver
- Wayne Robertson, Legal Representatives, Vancouver
- Jeanette Hermes, Lawyer, Vancouver
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Castlegar
- Judy Hayes, Vancouver Ministry of Social Services
- Leslie Fraser, Vancouver Ministry of Social Services
- Colin Ensworth and Family and Children's Services Staff, Central North Vancouver
- Julia Marrs, Family and Children's Services Office, North Vancouver
- Bill Engelson, Richmond East
- Unidentified, Burnaby Willingdon
- Roberta Hughes, Ministry of Social Services, Vancouver
- Susan Ward, Ministry of Social Services, Salmon Arm
- Jim McCaffery, Family and Children's Services, Ministry of Social Services, Abbotsford
- Peter Birch, Ministry of Social Services, Revelstoke
- Zoe Friesen, Fernwood District Programs for Independence
- Leslie McHughes, Nanaimo Programs for Independence
- Graham Ramsay, Family and Children's Services, Ministry of Social Services, Nanaimo
- Family and Children's Services Staff, Ministry of Social Services, Parksville
- Riley Hern, Family and Children's Services, Ministry of Social Services, Langford
- Hank Vander Pol and Staff, Family and Children's Services, Ministry of Social Services, Victoria
- Bill McFarland
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Salmon Arm, Revelstoke and Golden
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Lower Mainland, Vancouver
- Peter Kagis, Ministry of Social Services, Prince George
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Mission
- Family and Children's Services, Ministry of Social Services, Abbotsford
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Richmond
- Ann Miller, Victoria
- Patricia MacDonald, Dawson Creek
- Donna Wilson, St. James Social Services, Vancouver
- C. al Qamar Sangha, Vancouver
- Unidentified, Ministry of Social Services, Clearbrook
- Unidentified, Ministry of Social Services, Vancouver
- Unidentified
- Unidentified
- Janet Wheeler, Ministry of Social Services, Kensington, Vancouver
- Leslie Fraser, Ministry of Social Services, Vancouver
- Ken Beckett, Vancouver
- Ministry of Social Services Subcommittee, Vancouver Wife Assault Coordination
- Suzanne Veit, Family and Children's Services Division, Victoria
- Unidentified Ministry of Social Services Staff
- Marcel Chartier, McBride
- Sheila Bitschy, Mike Kennedy and Julie Dawson, Ministry of Social Services, Prince George
- Richard King and Jerry Stelmaschuk, Prince George
- Family and Children's Services Staff, Ministry of Social Services, Quesnel
- Wendy MacLean, Family and Children's Services, Ministry of Social Services, Kamloops
- Julie Russet, Kay Ross and Jane Perrault, Kamloops

MAKING CHANGES: A PLACE TO START

- Monica Sivertson and Staff, Ministry of Social Services, Kamloops
- John Friend and Staff, Ministry of Social Services, Kamloops
- Ministry of Social Services, South Central Interior
- Julie Bielman and staff, Ministry of Social Services, Terrace
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Williams Lake, 100 Mile House and Bella Coola
- Financial Assistance Workers, Ministry of Social Services, Kamloops
- Delma Hemming, Adoption Program Manager, Ministry of Social Services, Victoria
- Management, Ministry of Social Services, Vancouver
- Ministry of Social Services After Hours Staff, Vancouver
- Minister's Staff Committee on Multiculturalism, Vancouver
- Michael Stewart, Campbell River
- Family and Children's Services Staff, Ministry of Social Services, Campbell River
- Family and Children's Services Staff, Ministry of Social Services, Comox/Courtenay
- Ministry of Social Services Staff, Powell River
- Sharon Goddun and Vicki Sanzalone, Powell River
- T. Verdeil, C. Clements, Laurel Smith and Eleanor Voysey, North Vancouver Island Health Unit, Port Alberni
- Laurie Laughy, New Westminster
- Alana Mero, Cassiar
- Walter Lidster, Vancouver
- Leigh Ann Seller, Vancouver
- Charan Gill, Minister's Staff Advisory Committee on Multiculturalism
- Laurie Rockwell, Ministry of Social Services, Penticton
- Sue Rowe, Ministry of Social Services, Golden
- Suresh Kuri, Ministry of Social Services, North Delta
- Kootenay Society for Community Living, Castlegar
- Nelson and District Home Support Services Society
- Lena Leander, Boundary Family and Individual Service Society, Grand Forks
- Nelson Community Services Society
- Marilyn Fane, Chilliwack Community Services
- B.C. Parents in Crisis Society, Burnaby
- The Detached Youth Program, New Westminster
- Arlene Gladstone, North Shore Family Services Society
- Karen Leboe, Central Okanagan Emergency Shelter Society
- Penny Mitchell, Resource Enhancement Worker, Nanaimo
- Robin Pike, Fernwood House Society, Victoria
- John Cossom, Pacific Centre Family Services, Victoria
- David Baxter, Kelowna Family Centre
- Hazel Plumbley, South Peace Community Resources Society, Dawson Creek
- Simon Beck, Fraser South ICCR, Cloverdale
- Brad Watson, The Society of Special Needs Adoptive Parents, Delta
- Westcoast Parenting Resources and Education Projects Society, Vancouver
- Sheila Loranger, Kamloops Y Women's Emergency Shelter
- Ian Maas, Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- Joan Wenstob, B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations, Vancouver
- Stefa Shaler, Shaler Group Homes, Vancouver
- Michael McCoy, Touchstone Family Association, Richmond
- Vancouver Family Court and Youth Justice Committee, Vancouver

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Public and private hearings were held in the following communities:

- Abbotsford
- Cache Creek
- Campbell River
- Castlegar
- Chilliwack
- Coquitlam
- Cranbrook
- Dawson Creek
- Dease Lake
- Fort Nelson
- Fort St. John
- Hazelton
- Langley
- Kamloops
- Kelowna
- Maple Ridge
- Nanaimo
- Nelson
- New Westminster
- North Vancouver
- Penticton
- Port Alberni
- Powell River
- Prince George
- Prince Rupert
- Queen Charlotte City
- Quesnel
- Richmond
- Smithers
- Surrey
- Terrace
- Vancouver
- Vanderhoof
- Vernon
- Victoria
- Williams Lake

The Community Panel held meetings with interpretation services with members of the following communities:

- Chinese
- Indo-Canadian
- Latin American
- Vietnamese

Appendix 2: Bibliography

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Note: The bibliography includes published and unpublished documents pertinent to the discussion of child and family services. While some citations are incomplete, they have been included in an effort to create as comprehensive a list as possible.

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**Appendix 3:
Additional
Acknowledgements**

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The Community Panel would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals and organizations:

Information Management:	PRAXIS, Inc. Richard Roberts	Field Support:	Kim Howes
Notetakers:	Diane Miller Michael Mullins Colin Rankin Phillipe Reicher John Stark	Copy Editing:	T.D. Mock & Associates Inc.
Ministry of Social Services Library Services:		Design and Production of Report to the Minister:	K. J. Lee & Associates Inc.
Librarians:	Rob Harvey Peter Rose	Readers for Translated Summary Documents:	Charan Gill Suresh Kurl Tuoi Nguyen Nora Patrich Suzanne Veit Amy Yuh
Audiovisual Technician:	Daryl Lacey	Translation and Copy Editing of Summary:	M.O.S.A.I.C.
Researchers:	Barbara Herringer Sharon Hume Barbara Isaac Pauline Johnson Marjorie Martin Russell Ogden Laurie Pearce Richard Sullivan		

The Community Panel would like to thank the following individuals for their participation at the round table meetings:

Peter Ashmore	Rita Chudnowsky	Ian Maas	Jan Lutke
Oliver Conway	Cindy Betteher	Don McDougall	Rita Markland
Bruce Cooke-Dallin	Suresh Kurl	Bill McFarland	Tom Nelson
Chris Harvey	Barbara Brett	Gerry McHale	June Preston
Theresa Kerin	Nora Curry	Claire Reilly	Lex Reynolds
Hopeton Laudon	Joyce Rigaux	Zena Simces-Katz	Twyla Russel
Betty MacPhee	Ron Pound	Richard Sullivan	Audrey Scammel
Alana Mero	Brigitte Kitchen	Bernd Walter	Kathy Taylor
Michael Olson	Parvin Partovi	Judy Archer	Trudy Usher
Keith Pattinson	Jean Swanson	Dana Brynelsen	Brad Watson
Richard Sullivan	Stuart Alcock	Trudy Denton	Dr. Michael Whitfield
Maureen Tremblay	David Cruikshank	Ken Derby	Tom Wilson
Marjorie Martin	Wendy Harvey	Kathy Gillstom	Jack McDonald
Penny Parry	Dr. Jean Hlady	Pam Hendy	
Ruth Annis	Linda Light	Brenda Knight	